

THE ONLY POINT
ON WHICH THEY
ALL AGREE. (Now emphasizing the fact that the only point on which they all agree is that they are all wrong.)



—MAT. XI., 25.

POLITICAL ATHEISM.
25. BRADLAUGH.

men who keep a footing in the Church while fully advanced outside it. On him the Low and High Churchmen turned their backs, and the Broadist side saw in Science, Philosophy and Education "look for the dawn of a day whose noontide glory will dispel the gloom and give warmth to the chilling and austere light of truth." "I am anxious," he wrote, "to see the Church of England the vigorous force 'The Dissolution of Descent'."

Booth, Sankey, Moody, Parker, and yet Arthur, and Dumbair all conscientiously believe in God, and believe that He believes in them, supplementing their confident able consciousness by believing not less enthusiastically in themselves. Boddard compares their faith in ability to accept the first and best of all gifts: free life, a choice and deep enjoyment of all that is good.

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THE LONDON HERETICS

Books edited by Warren Sylvester Smith

The Religious Speeches of Bernard Shaw
Shaw on Religion

WARREN SYLVESTER SMITH

THE LONDON HERETICS

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FOR MAE

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W. S. S.

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A NOTE ON THE ENDPAPERS

This cartoon was originally the work of George Jacob Holyoake, the eminent Secularist, who sometimes wrote and drew under the pseudonym, ION. It was first drawn by him in the seventies and then, with the help of the artist F. C. Gould, revised in 1883.

I first read of this picture in Moncure Conway's *Autobiography* where it is described in considerable detail. Conway, who is one of the characters depicted, was obviously amused and pleased with it. However, he gave no source or date, and in all of my paging through the Secularist magazines of the period, I never came across it. Eventually, I discovered a copy of it, almost by accident, hanging on the wall of the museum room in London's City Temple. I am indebted to the curator, Mr. Bertram Hammond, for his permission and co-operation in having it photographed. Apparently it did not appear in a publication at all, at least in this revised form, but was distributed separately for sixpence.

Naturally I do not endorse Holyoake's point of view on all the people and movements he has brought into his cartoon. It is such an inclusive assembly, however, and so pertinent to the matter of the book, that I thought a perusal of it might serve the reader as well as a written introduction.

W. S. S.

The legend beneath the illustration reads:

This Cartoon claims to be an accurate bird's-eye view of the relations of the National Church and its Parties, with the outside Sects, Heresies, and Schools of Thought to each other.

Ten years ago a crude sketch with this title was published, which, despite its deplorably inartistic quality, met with an unlooked for success. I have now reconstructed, revised, and brought down to date that original sketch, and, being no artist

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myself, have enlisted the pencil of Mr. F. C. Gould to "invest with artistic merit" my dry bones of design.

The Dome of St. Paul's represents the Church as the umbrella under whose shelter are assembled those who claim to belong to the Church. The bell, "Great Paul", is here placed where it can be seen, as its dismal moan is nigh inaudible in the precincts. The Support of the umbrella is the Cross, the spiritual principle, which appears to rest on the Prayer Book and Bible on the seat of the Throne. The Bible is half on and half off, being less entirely relied upon than of old; the Prayer Book is a State Document, but the Revised Version occupies a much inferior position. The Cross has the omnipotent support of the Sceptre and Lord Chancellor's Mace, emblems of Sovereignty and Law. But while the Cross supports and illuminates the Church, it is itself intangible, and does not need the illusory support of the Throne. The umbrella is tilted to one side, which illustrates the text that the Church is on the rock—very much indeed—and we shall now see why.

Well placed, close to the Throne, stand the Archbishops and the Broad Churchmen, of less use as buttresses of the Cross than as ornaments to the Throne. Farrar recently renounced his faith in eternal torment, and has basked in promotion and popularity since. These are comfortably under the umbrella however it is pulled about.

At the reader's left hand from the Throne are the Low Church School, numerically and otherwise a feeble folk, who are unable to keep more than a bare shelter over their heads, although they have weighted their side of the umbrella with a Court of Arches that can bite and a Church Ass. that once could kick.

On the opposite side are a more numerous and vigorous band of workers, the High Churchmen. Canon Gregory is getting as good a Gregorian tone out of his bell as he can, and he, with the Knox-Little Canon up aloft are well in the sunshine of the Throne, though pulling very effectively the while. Canon Liddon is head and shoulders outside the boundary line and means to pull the Church with him. Mr. Mackonochie's most intimate connection with it seems now to be merely from behind.

The picture has two sides, sunrise and shadow. On the Rome side, out from the Dome, march con and per-verts chanting the

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familiar processional, as the great Ecclesiastic Manning, and the greater old man, Newman, gives encouragement to the Canonical rope-pullers who so successfully stimulate the Newmanism for Romanising the English Church and deserting it.

Ex pede Pontificus; there it is, handy for such as think it *Ex-pede*-ent to kiss. Higher than the High Church, yet not in Rome, Father Ignatius thanks God he is not as other men are, and the rest of mankind, in the interests of the propagation of the race, reciprocate the sentiment.

On the reader's left is a group of Liberation Society Champions, engaged in pulling another sort of rope, fastened not to the Dome but to the Throne. These declare that they do not want to destroy the Throne, but by removing it the Cross will not only stand as before, but more of it will be visible, and the Church will the sooner regain its equilibrium when it rests solely upon its "One True Foundation," or else fall by the hands of those it shelters. Archbishop Benson, who knows the ropes well, does not handle any of the others, but he puts his foot upon this one. The bust of Wesley is within the pale, and the President of Conference seems disposed to a benevolent neutrality "for auld lang syne."

Apart sits a Quaker, serenely indifferent, as a Society, to other folks' umbrellas, though as individuals they act as they like. Sprinkled around the daylight margin of the Church are Haweis, giving himself a few charming airs as his feet stretch out into the open; Voysey and Brooke—anchoring or hankering? Conway plants his tent to catch the latest zephyr breeze and entrap the earliest scientific sunbeam. The late Bp. Colenso (whose decease occurred after the drawing was printed), represented a large section of Churchmen who keep a footing in the Church while far advanced outside it. On him the Low and High Churchmen turned their backs, and the Broad stood sideways. Science, Philosophy and Education look for the dawn of a day whose noontide glory will dispel the gloom and give warmth to the chilling influences behind them.

The remaining actors are engaged in performing the curious farce "The Dissonance of Dissent."

Booth, Sankey, Moody, Parker, and ex-Archdeacon Dunbar all conscientiously believe in God, and believe that He believes

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in them, supplementing that comfortable consciousness by believing not less enthusiastically in themselves. Bradlaugh compensates for his inability to accept the first two articles of this creed by a threefold endorsement of the third.—ION, *June*, 1883.

*I will not cease from mental fight
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till I have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.*
—William Blake (the motto of Stewart Headlam's
The Church Reformer)

When at the close (shall we say) of a great period in the history of man, we cast our eyes back on the course of events, from the "angel of His presence in the wilderness" to the multitude of peoples, nations, languages, who are being drawn together by His Providence—from the simplicity of the pastoral state in the dawn of the world's day, to all the elements of civilization and knowledge which are beginning to melt and mingle in a common life, we also understand that we are no longer in our early home, to which, nevertheless, we fondly look; and that the end is yet unseen, and the purposes of God towards the human race only half revealed.

Benjamin Jowett, *Essays And Reviews*, 1860

*O may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence: live
In pulses stirred to generosity,
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
For miserable aims that end with self,
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
And with their mild persistence urge man's search
To vaster issues.*

So to live is heaven.

George Eliot, 1867

We who assail the Christian faith are the true successors of the early Christians, above whom we are raised by the progress of eighteen hundred years. As they preached against gods made of stone, so we preach against gods that are made of ideas. As they were called atheists and blasphemers, so are we.

Winwood Reade, *The Martyrdom Of Man*, 1872

THE LONDON CLIMATE

Doubt, Poverty and Hope

In history there are no real beginnings. The antecedents of the spiritual upheaval of our own century stretch back through the Renaissance and the Reformation into all parts of Europe and are lost in the maze of the Middle Ages. Still, from our view, it appears that there may have been a time and a place when these threads were gathered together as through a giant hand—an English hand. The place was specifically London; the time, that generation-and-a-half whose lives were consummated before the outbreak of the First World War.

An earlier group lay behind them, a group of theorists and thinkers whose contributions are on the shelves of libraries. We are concerned here with the activists, those who founded movements, edited fugitive journals, debated with orthodoxy and with each other, and occasionally sat in jail; whose lives were often spent between the thumping of cheap presses and the catcalls of the public meeting.

The year 1870 is, like almost any date, an arbitrary one. Still, there are good reasons for beginning with this decade. Darwin's last great book, *The Descent of Man*, was issued in 1871; John Stuart Mill died in 1873; Dickens in 1870. The principal contributions of Carlyle and Tennyson were over. True, Carlyle continued to growl angrily at his disciples for another decade. Ruskin was passing on his medieval romantic dream to William Morris. George Eliot and Matthew Arnold were popularizing Victorian doubt and giving it an emotional dimension. Samuel Butler's barbs were yet to be felt. But the historian R. C. K. Ensor, who makes use of these same dates (in *England 1870-1914*) also feels that

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... round about 1870 occurs a watershed in English life. The race of giants, who had rendered the first half of Queen Victoria's reign so memorable, had passed or was passing; Gladstone was alone among them in making history right through to 1886 and even beyond.¹

The historian, Howard R. Murphy, thinks that the elements of dissatisfaction and emancipation began to be widely felt back in the 1840s, quite independent of these great minds.² But as far as the outward symptoms of such change can be discerned, John McKinnon Robertson was justified in placing the decade of the seventies as "the turning of the balance of educated intelligence from the current creed to unbelief".³ Certainly by that time both social and intellectual shock-waves were being felt and reacted to.

For many of the faithful, the appearance of *Essays and Reviews*⁴ by seven liberal churchmen in 1860 presented a greater shock than *Origin of Species* the year before. Two of the *Essays'* authors (Wilson and Williams) were actually tried in the church courts and were saved from conviction only by an appeal to the Privy Council. Prosecution was begun against Jowett, too, but was dropped. Frederick Temple's essay in the collection, though not actually endorsing Darwinian evolution, did assume that man was a developing creature and could not therefore have been literally "created" from the dust of Eden. Rowland Williams's review tacitly accepted geological time-sequences that ruled out Bishop Ussher's six-thousand-year-old world. C. W. Goodwin similarly found the first chapters of Genesis unsatisfactory as a textbook in geology or astronomy. And Benjamin Jowett went so far as to support "a continuous growth of revelation", and asked that the scripture be interpreted with the same scholarship accorded any other reputable book!

To all this was added the telling weight of Biblical criticism from the Continent. John Haynes Holmes has judged that Ernest Renan's *Life of Jesus* ranks with *Origin of Species* and *Das Kapital* as a work which changed the currents of world thought. In two sentences, says Holmes, "there disappeared the lovely Bethlehem story, the dogma of the virgin birth, the whole theology of the incarnation and the atonement".⁵

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For an entertaining and dramatic account of the clash of the new thought with old orthodoxy one can turn to William Irvine's popular *Apes, Angels, and Victorians*.⁶ One can sense the near desolation more immediately in the conclusions of a young Albert Schweitzer after his review of Biblical criticism from the 1860s to 1906:

There is nothing more negative than the result of the critical study of the Life of Jesus.

The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publicly as the Messiah, who preached the ethic of the Kingdom of God, who founded the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, and died to give His work its final consecration, never had any existence. He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb. . . .

The historical Jesus will be to our time a stranger and an enigma.⁷

The dilemma of the old-fashioned Christian, caught between the New Science and the New Criticism, is neatly put by Dr. Alec Vidler:

The whole scheme of Christian belief, which was based on the supposition that man had all at once been created with a fully formed capacity for communion with God, a capacity that the human race had lost through disobedience of the first human pair, was thrown into disarray. The work of Christ had been to redress this primordial catastrophe. If it had not happened then the doctrine of redemption and atonement stood in jeopardy too.⁸

From a purely external viewpoint traditional religion did not seem disturbed by these intellectual inundations. Chapels and churches remained, for the most part, crowded. Books of conventional sermons were always among the best-sellers. Missionary zeal was high. The American revivalists, Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey, stormed London in 1875 after a wildly successful year in other parts of the British Isles. (The Secular Press was more than happy to see them leave for home. In an obvious mood

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of "sour grapes" the *Secular Journal* noted that they had not diminished criminal statistics in England, and besides there was enough for them to do in New York!)

Still, Vidler is tempted to ascribe much of the Church activity to conformity. And the "crowds" were not very impressive when they were studied statistically. George Cadbury, conducting an inquiry for his *Daily News*, found that though the population in his area of study had increased by half a million in the fifteen years ending with 1902, the practising Christians had dwindled by 150,000. Only 16 per cent of Londoners, at that juncture, were practising Christians. The masses were not hostile to religion, merely indifferent.⁹ Confronted by the Salvation Army and revivalism on the one hand and organized Freethought on the other, the greatest gainers¹⁰ by 1895, it is interesting to note, were the ritualists—high church and Catholics!

The vigour and effectiveness of the London heretics, who rode their crest in the eighties, could not be adequately judged by statistics. Even if it were known how many tons of newsprint were consumed and how many halls hired, we would have scant understanding in human terms of what Mrs. Humphry Ward liked to call "The New Reformation". It is unlikely in any case that any of the non-Christian heretical groups directly affected church attendance. But perceptive churchmen always knew that the threat posed by the heretics was far in excess of their numbers; and *from within* orthodoxy became defensive and even fearful.

Still, if church attendance was largely mere conformity, might one not also ask in equal fairness how much of the Victorian "anguish" was mere pose? As Shaw once observed, "The enthusiasm for getting rid of God was, like all enthusiasms, not very critical."¹¹ Convinced that the first chapter of Genesis was false, there were those who fled almost eagerly from religion and responsibility to join the fashionably decadent—the "futilitarians". By the eighteen-nineties London was not only a place of wildly forward-looking movements; it was also a place of refined perversity. It was the home of Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley and Ernest Dowson. Many adopted the drugged hopeless tone of Swinburne's earlier *Garden of Proserpine*:

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From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be
That no life lives for ever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

Or A. H. Clough's

Eat, drink and die, for we are souls bereaved:
Of all the creatures under heaven's wide cope
We are most hopeless, who had once most hope,
And most beliefless, that had most believed.

Motives for martyrdom, however poetic, are naturally hard to verify. One of the most quoted works of the age—a kind of substitute Bible for many Secularists—was Winwood Reade's *The Martyrdom of Man*, published in 1872. The point of his title was that, in the past, each generation had been tortured so that posterity might improve. Now, said Reade, we must look forward to a season of *mental* anguish for the same cause. We must suffer the death of our illusions.

The soul must be sacrificed; the hope in immortality must die. A sweet and charming illusion must be taken from the human race, as youth and beauty vanish never to return.¹²

This is a brilliant, though romantic, concept, and no doubt helped many a reader to accept the spiritual anxiety that an "advanced" position imposed on him.

There is abundant testimony, at least, that the anguish was something more than a romantic pose for many serious young Victorians—"that most awful of all mental struggles, the parting with inherited religious belief," one writer of the eighties calls it.¹³ "This struggle can hardly be conceived as undergone in a vicarious sense," he says. "Each one must face it for himself." It appeared that the more dismal was one's belief the more painful was the parting from it. John Trevor, who was to found the Labour Church movement in later years, recalls in his childhood

his very real fear of Hell, the escape from which was the one absorbing problem of his early years. At the age of forty-two, having long departed from his early faith, he still suffered from the recall of these childhood emotions.

Above all things was a thunderstorm terrible to me, especially at night. Bathed in perspiration and trembling with terror, I asked myself what it would be if, that very night, I were killed and awoke in Hell, where I should never cease to suffer, and whence there would be absolutely no hope of escape. . . .

Over and over again have I wished that I had never been born.¹⁴

All this was made worse for Trevor by his certainty that he alone among his household and friends was the one to be doomed. He could recall no physical pain as dreadful. The boyhood of G. J. Holyoake, the first of the eminent Secularists, was beset with similar supernatural cares—especially on Sundays.

Pleasure was a temptation, joy a crime, and death a horrid foreboding. . . . No God ever had a truer suppliant or a more devout worshipper; yet those near and dear to me perished unheeded around me.¹⁵

These were the tortures of Calvinism itself. It is not surprising that the break from it, when it had finally been accomplished, was often followed by a great sense of liberation and an extraordinary release of energy. Indeed the entire period must owe much to these early repressions as the source of its later unparalleled vitality.

Even those brought up in a more congenial climate were not immune from the demons. Young Beatrice Potter (to become Mrs. Sidney Webb) confesses to her diary at age fourteen:

I feel that if I continue thus I shall become a frivolous, silly, unbelieving woman, and yet every morning when I wake I have the same giddy confident feeling and every night I am miserable. The only thing is to give up any pleasure rather [than] go into society; it may be hard, in fact I know it will, but it must be done, else I shall lose all the remaining sparks of faith, and with those all the chances of my becoming a good and useful woman in this world and a companion of our Lord in the next.¹⁶

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In view of her later work as a social scientist, it is interesting to note that her diaries reveal her as a precocious girl, serious, spiritual, searching, but with an irrepressible love of life and pleasure. She confessed herself an agnostic by the age of nineteen, but Catholicism attracted her—particularly the mysticism of Father Tyrrell.

It is a relief, therefore, to find that some Victorian childhoods could be religiously placid. The future Positivist, Malcolm Quin, recalls,

Ours was a household of easy-going Anglicanism. We had no black Calvinism to frighten us. Hell and damnation were not thrust at our young souls. We had no marked sense of sin. Bible-reading was not made a punishment to us. We were not afflicted with pious talk. Our religion was principally church-going, and church-going—for me, at least—was never unpleasant. It was, in fact, agreeable—and this most of all when I became a youthful “high churchman” and worship was transformed into a poem of Heaven.¹⁷

Still, he too, by the age of nineteen, was an unbeliever. The persistence of “high church” ritual in Positivism, however, will be noted later.

The loss of belief—or the struggle to retain it—became inevitably the theme of many poems and stories, even of a few plays. Among the poems a few landmarks are remembered—Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*, Arnold’s *Dover Beach*. Almost all the plays and stories are forgotten—happily forgotten, perhaps, as far as literary merit is concerned. Yet in their day the novels were to be found in almost every home library, and were devoured with sympathy and with tears. William Hale White’s two Mark Rutherford books appeared anonymously in the early eighties (*The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* and *Mark Rutherford’s Deliverance*). The protagonist of the title was a minister of the gospel (a favourite occupation for the hero of a Victorian novel) who revolted from orthodoxy and moved to Unitarianism and finally to a vague theism. This journey, as we shall see, was not restricted to fiction. Rutherford’s “deliverance”, however, was more a literary convenience than an acceptable solution. His American cousin could be found in Harold

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Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware*. The leading characters of Hall Caine's *The White Prophet* and Gerhart Hauptmann's *The Fool in Christ* (available in English by 1911) also found true religion in mysticism rather than in orthodox worship.

The real phenomenon among the sentimental "preacher novels" appeared (in three volumes) in 1888, and remained a best-seller in England and America for many years thereafter. It was *Robert Elsmere*, by Mrs. Humphry Ward. Its remarkable success brought fame and wealth to the thirty-six-year-old niece of Matthew Arnold; and it formed the basis for sermons, pro and con, throughout Christendom. Water Pater and Henry James praised it without condescension. It was denounced, with sorrow, by William Ewart Gladstone. *The Unitarian* called it "probably the most popularly effective plea ever made before the English-speaking world for a rational Christianity as distinguished from the Christianity of irrational dogma".¹⁸

Mrs. Ward, herself a careful student of the German school of Bible criticism, managed to fashion an emotional and complex story, using all the elements of the religious revolt of her day. Her hero, a young rector, is challenged by a teacher (modelled, possibly, on T. H. Green or Frederick Denison Maurice) whose advice he has side-stepped in going into the Church. He marries the traditional Victorian heroine—beautiful, faithful, intelligent and highly "Christian". His principal antagonist is a flinty intellectual Squire, who will at first do nothing to improve his holdings while the poor die of diphtheria. Elsmere at length forces him into a sense of social responsibility to the dependent villagers, and the two men come to a *détente*. But the Squire has a strange revenge. He opens his unusual library to Elsmere, and Catherine watches with terror as her husband is drawn on and on along the path of Rationalism and Freethought. There is no doubt that readers identified in great numbers and with high empathy:

In the stillness of the night there rose up weirdly before him a whole new mental picture—effacing, pushing out, innumerable older images of thought. It was the image of a purely human Christ—a purely human, explicable, yet always

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wonderful Christianity. It broke his heart, but the spell of it was like some dream-country wherein we see all the familiar objects of life in new relations and perspectives. He gazed upon it fascinated, the wailing underneath checked awhile by the strange beauty and order of the emerging spectacle. Only a little while. Then with a groan Elsmere looked up, his eyes worn, his lips white and set.

"I must face it—I must face it through! God help me!"¹⁹

Elsmere must withdraw from the orthodox Church and go to London to found a new liberal sect among working men: "The New Brotherhood of Christ." Although the hero dies, in the good tradition of nineteenth-century novels, his wife, torn between her old orthodoxy and the love of her husband, carries on. "The New Brotherhood exists and grows," the final page records.

Since it was 1888, Mrs. Ward may have been modelling this part of her story in terms of the actual Fellowship of the New Life, though she herself was active a few years later in forming a new settlement in Tavistock Place. Conversely the book must have played its part in influencing people like W. J. Jupp, who, in 1890 (according to the organ, *Seed-time*) resigned his position as minister of Thornton Heath Congregational Church, Croydon, and initiated a Free Religions Movement there "based on principles of the New Fellowship". But in personality and direction, Moncure Conway seems closer to the fictional Elsmere, who came to the conclusion that

the miraculous Christian story rests on a tissue of mistake. . . . The problem of the world at this moment is—*how to find a religion?* Some great conception which shall be once more capable, as the old were capable, of wielding societies, and keeping men's brutish elements in check.²⁰

In the real world, too, energies released by these chemical changes in Victorian hearts usually resulted in the founding of an organization (brotherhood, guild, fellowship, society, league, union) or the publishing of a journal, or both. They were often, but not always, committed to a programme and a point of view. The London Dialectical Society was founded in the late sixties

to discuss the radical works of John Stuart Mill, but did not normally take sides. Its junior replica, the Zetetical ("truth-seeking") Society began in 1878 with the intent of furnishing "opportunities for the unrestricted discussion of Social, Political, and Philosophical subjects". At either of these advanced souls were privileged to participate in open consideration of matters generally considered taboo in Victorian drawing rooms. Dr. C. R. Drysdale held forth on "Malthusianism"—the current euphemism for birth control. The practice of cremation received its first impetus from the Dialecticals. "The tone was strongly individualistic, atheistic, Malthusian, evolutionary, Ingersollian, Darwinian, Herbert Spencerian," wrote Bernard Shaw, who belonged to both in the days when he was practising public speaking.²¹ The tone was also markedly feminist. The dapper Rev. Charles Maurice Davies, who set himself the obviously enjoyable journalistic task of visiting all the "heterodox" societies in London, found himself in the midst of the Dialecticals' discussion of "Chastity". "It was then quite a new sensation for me," he confessed, "to hear ladies discuss those hitherto proscribed subjects, and they were not elderly *bas bleus* either, but young ladies, married and unmarried."²²

Such "uncommitted" organizations were, as Shaw reported, largely swept aside by the rise of Socialism. Much of what was then printed, too, is now read only by the curious. "Filling many shelves in the giant libraries of the world, they testify to many things," writes the historian of the period, Herman Ausubel: "to the vitality of the reform impulse in late Victorian England; to the importance at the time of what a publisher's reader called 'the philanthropic public'; and to the sense of obligation that so many writers had that they must bear—and lessen—the burdens of the society in which they lived."²³

Especially in the earlier half of the period—to about 1890—pamphleteering was the fashion. Selling, usually, for a penny to sixpence, the pamphlets appeared at no specified intervals and were sold through the mails or at public meetings. Thomas Scott (Mount Pleasant, Ramsgate) began a series in 1868 under the banner of "Free Inquiry and Free Expression". The first was on the *Basis of a New Reformation*, apparently in support of the much publicized heresy of Charles Voysey. There were eventu-

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ally more than sixty of the Thomas Scott pamphlets, written by Voysey, F. W. Newman, Jeremy Bentham, E. Van-Sittart Neale, John Robertson *et al.* Many were anonymous. One, untitled as well, beginning "I ask your attention . . ." demolished Christianity with three simple blows: 1. Its God is a devil who means damnation. 2. Its Man is a worm. 3. Its religion is of the skies, not the earth.

Still, as we have noted, the Church failed to crumble.

The loss of faith in the old institutions was abetted by the social blight. Confidence in the Establishment (both Church and State) eroded as poverty—and the knowledge of it—spread. Good information was, for many years, hard to come by. Much of London thought of itself as the glittering centre of a wealthy empire and did not want to be convinced by dismal facts. Reports through the seventies and eighties could be largely dismissed as alarmist tracts, and consciences could be salved by generous contributions. But the rioting of the eighties shattered complacency. And those who could ignore the sensational journalism of W. T. Stead, had, in the end, to accept the careful studies of Charles Booth.

Beatrice Webb, in fact, felt that the real origins of the ferment of the late Victorian era lay in a new "sense of sin" among men of intellect and property. There was a kind of collective guilt that the industrial organization which had yielded them rent, interest, and profits so handsomely had failed to provide tolerable livings for millions of Britons.²⁴

Modern historians speak of the depression of 1879 extending through to the late nineties. Nearly fifteen years before this beginning date, however, Frederic Harrison found quarters in London where the death rate was double what it should be, particularly in home industries of matchbox-making, where arsenic and sulphur fumes caused bone and lung damage. Children below the working ages were kept drugged with opium; those who were old enough lived a kind of half-conscious treadmill existence, rarely reaching adulthood.²⁵ Such reports became more and more common.

It was not until 1883 that really wide circulation was given

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to such exposures. In that year a Rev. Andrew Mearns, with the aid of other clergymen of the London Congregational Union, published anonymously *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*. K. S. Inglis has noted that much of the pamphlet's evidence was drawn from a tract by G. R. Sims on *How the Poor Live*. But the Mearns work had the more sensational title and was distributed for a penny.²⁶ More important it was excerpted for the *Pall Mall Gazette* by W. T. Stead, who omitted most of its evangelistic message. The twenty-page pamphlet promised sensational reading at the outset by explaining that the writers were forced to tone the report down, since no respectable printer would print, and no decent family would read, the details of the whole truth. It called the slum dwellings "pestilential human rookeries", described "poisonous and malodorous gases rising from accumulations of sewage . . . rotten staircases . . . vermin . . . rude substitutes for furniture".

The method of *Bitter Cry*'s presentation was largely that of focusing on highly sensational sample cases: in one East-End cellar, a father, mother, three children, four pigs; in a room, a man with smallpox, a wife recovering from her eighth confinement, children filthy and half naked. Undisposed corpses. Morality? Non-existent. "Ask if the man and woman living together in these rookeries are married, and your simplicity will cause a smile. Nobody knows. Nobody cares. Nobody expects that they are."

The report does not rest on statistics, but one of the investigators found thirty-two brothels on a street of thirty-five houses, with some of the girls not more than twelve. There is a rough estimate of 400 prostitutes per 10,000 population. The home matchbox industry continues with the worker receiving 2½ pence per gross, supplying his own paste and string and fire. Seventeen-hour days are not uncommon. Church attendance, as would be expected, is *nil*.

The recommendations of the pamphlet are for parliamentary action and more mission work by the Churches.²⁷

The facts of the *Bitter Cry* were generally accepted and found shocking. Still there was no accurate source to indicate how widespread such conditions really were. But curiosity was aroused. The Social Democratic Federation sent its own team

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into the working men's areas of Clerkenwell, Paddington, and Marylebone in the late winter of 1885 and found about 50 per cent of the employable men out of work.²⁸

Trustworthy information had to await the work of Charles Booth (not to be confused with salvationist William), a wealthy shipowner and manufacturer who invested his own time and money to produce his eighteen-volume *Life and Labours of the People in London*. Booth's wife was a cousin of Beatrice Potter (Webb) and it may have been this family connection that first aroused Beatrice's interest in social science. In any case we owe to her a description of Booth's methods. Compared with the information-gathering techniques of modern social scientists they may seem loosely "controlled". Compared with earlier investigators he is indeed a pioneer. He made use of the census figures for 1881 and 1891. He used paid canvassers who were carefully instructed in the questions they should ask—occupation, income, housing, servants, etc. He made use of the records of school attendance officers, police, and clergy. On three different occasions, in order to make personal observations, he took up residence in areas where he was not known.²⁹

In the late eighties, London contained roughly four million people and Booth began his study with the most destitute million, the East End. It is worth noting that he had become aroused about conditions through the work of Frederic Harrison and other Positivists, though he himself never joined their order. Eventually his study became a street-by-street survey, with topographical "maps of poverty". These details have no place here except to note that at long last they were available—not as emotional tracts, but as cold unanswerable charts. In an overall view as of about 1890 London turned out to be stratified as follows:

The Very Poor	below 18s per week	8.4 %
The Poor	18s to 21s per week	22.3 %
Comfortable Working Classes		
(including all servants)		51.5 %
Middle and Upper Classes		17.8 %

In short, well over half of London lived in relative comfort, but the depressed thirty per cent were below subsistence standards.

Furthermore, on closer study the *span* between the extremes was as great as any Socialist agitator had dared to claim it was. The lower twelve per cent, for example, lived three or more to a room—i.e., fifteen persons in a five-roomed house. The upper twelve per cent averaged suites of rooms per person, plus a servant for every three or four persons.

All reform legislation thereafter rested on Booth's monumental work. All later studies began with it as a base and a model, including Sidney and Beatrice Webb's Fabian Tracts and their 1909 "Charter of the Poor"—a plan for a new governmental approach to the problem of poverty. When Bernard Shaw later said of the deserving Webbs that they "were the first Socialists who did what Charles Darwin did: that is ignore the generalities of Marx and Buckle, and investigate the facts with unremitted industry . . ." he might perhaps have added that Charles Booth, a non-socialist, had blazed that trail for them.³⁰

Ironically it is General William Booth of the Salvation Army who is usually credited with shaking England from its complacency about the social problem. Armed with many of Charles's figures, and with editorial help and encouragement from W. T. Stead, the General produced in 1890 *In Darkest England and the Way Out*. (The title was meant to be an easily recognizable paraphrase of the explorer Stanley's lecture series: *In Darkest Africa*.) It was an immediate best-seller and no wonder! It was racy, factual, down-to-earth. The figures, mostly borrowed from Charles Booth, were new to the general reader, and presented in much more lively context. And they were embellished with case records from the Salvation Army shelters, or statements from those who slept on the Embankment. "I found a bit of bread in the road wrapped up in a bit of paper. That did for me yesterday!" . . . "When it's wet, we stand about all night under the arches. . . ." "There are women who sleep out here. They are decent people, mostly charwomen and such like who can't get work." Statistics of prostitution take on a new dread when Booth describes the ageing prostitute (past thirty!) with the ring of direct observation. "We have found girls in Piccadilly at midnight who are continually prostrated by haemorrhage, yet have no other way of life open. . . ."

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Yet much of Booth's success lay in his refusal to take a high moral tone with sinners. "Terrible as the fact is . . . there is no industrial career in which for a short time a beautiful girl can make as much money with as little trouble as in the profession of courtesan." He freely admitted this, and estimated her earnings at from 500 to 4,000 pounds per year. Nor had he any patience with the prudery of the time which led some girls, overcome with shame and horror after one misstep, to accept the streets rather than face parents or friends. In spite of a fundamentalist theology Booth was not other-worldly. He was equally scornful of promising the destitute either the rewards of Heaven, or of a Socialist Utopia after the revolution.

Booth's solutions to the problem were daring and imaginative. They amounted in effect to an American New Deal under the sponsorship of the Salvation Army. They included a City Colony, a Farm Colony, and an Oversea Colony—an emigration bureau, a labour bureau, a matrimonial bureau, prison reform, enforced holidays, insurance, compensation—in short a new and centralized society with Booth's organization at the centre. Of course Salvation meetings were to go with all of this. People, not merely society, must be changed. But the meetings were to be cheerful, vigorous, disarming—and voluntary!³¹

The Salvation Army, successful as it was, could never fulfil these dreams. The effect of the book was temporary. Its sales skyrocketed then abruptly declined. Booth himself was revered by many, but feared by some—both inside and outside his organization—as a potential dictator. Nevertheless the General, along with his namesake, Charles, and the flamboyant journalist, W. T. Stead, left London little excuse for ignorance of its own economic illness after 1890.

The illness, when known, did not immediately subside. On an ordinary midwinter night in 1892 three hundred destitute men applied at one of the free shelters in East London for bare boards to lie down on. Ninety were necessarily turned away. One died of exposure, and it was only the coroner's inquest that reintroduced the unwelcome facts once more to the Press.³² In 1895 a Fabian Tract was complaining that the Shop Hours Act was being regularly violated; consequently workers under eighteen years of age were being kept at work for more than the requisite

limit of seventy-four hours per week.³³ Cadbury's *Daily News* in 1906 was still "exposing" wages and conditions in the sweated industries. Chain-makers worked eleven hours per day for six or eight shillings per week. Shirt-makers, on piece rate, could scarcely better a penny an hour.³⁴

Still, as the new century progressed, there was improvement. Free compulsory education, reform legislation, public health and factory laws brought change and hope. By the end of the century most streets were paved and sewerred. Housing, still crowded, was under better state regulation and inspection. Libraries and playgrounds were more numerous and accessible.³⁵ Wage increases were small, but food was cheaper. Life looked a little brighter for those who did not know what lay on the other side of the gathering war clouds.

The alleviation came too late to affect any of the subjects of this book. Their London was one of poverty, just as it was one of doubt. Our chief characters were almost painfully upright, but they moved against a background that was "sodden with drink" (as General Booth expressed it), and rife with all the other by-products of a precarious existence with little hope—irresponsibility, low vitality, too early and improvident mating, a mental diet of sensationalism.³⁶

The rooms they live in are dull, ill-lighted, devoid of ornament. The museums, picture galleries, art-collections, are all closed on the one day of leisure in their busy week. The public-houses and the street corners are their places of recreation. Now and then a holiday breaks the succession of toiling days, and if fortunate enough to have saved sufficient for the trip, they take an excursion train to sea-shore or country-side, and tear up or trample down the beautiful things they have never learned to gaze at with understanding eyes. The only things they recognize as pleasure are noise and romp and free stretching of cramped limbs, with enough to eat and drink, and often, alas! too much of the latter.

It is a description by Annie Besant, who is likely to be florid in style but accurate in substance.³⁷

As the sordid conditions became known, the first impulse of generous people was towards increased charity. The traditional

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attitude towards wealth was that it was a blessing that carried with it a responsibility to the poor. The rising reform movement rejected such an ethic. It first became clear that charitable action, though often necessary, would never be sufficient. Socialists found it counter-revolutionary and immoral. Organized almsgiving, with its efforts to separate the "deserving" or the "helpable", approached something akin to cynicism for Beatrice Potter.³⁸ General Booth, who certainly knew the problem at first hand, concluded that the day-to-day feeding, bedding, and healing of the poor—if this was all that was done—probably would in the long run do more harm than good.³⁹

Charlotte Payne-Townshend, still a wealthy spinster searching for a purpose for her life, but already under the influence of the Fabians, wrote to her friend, Augustine Henry, on the subject. Philanthropy should be a whole new study, she thought. The present position of the philanthropist (1897) said more for his heart than for his head.

Is what is wanted a new science? Something like the science of medicine applied collectively, and which will consist of the study of these social horrors we are talking of from the point of view of recent discovery: the study, in fact, of sociology . . . I believe there is *no* hope for the degraded, the oppressed, the poor under existing social conditions, that it is no use trying to help them directly.⁴⁰

About a year later she married Bernard Shaw.

If not philanthropy, then some radical change in the social order was necessary. Could it stop short of revolution? "Socialism" took many forms, some springing from religious grounds. "Millions cannot at all reconcile the present state of society and suffering as in accordance with the love of Him who is represented as a God of Love," wrote one of the founders of the Land Labour League about 1874.⁴¹ Thus the forces of social revolt often ran parallel to, and sometimes joined, the revolt against the old faith. But there was no unanimity. There were secular socialists and deeply religious socialists. There were secularists who regarded any socialism as anathema. Always the new god, Science, brooded somewhere in the background.

And what was Socialism? Was it the land reform and single

tax of Henry George? A return to primitive Christianity with F. D. Maurice? An idyllic nation of craftsmen envisioned by William Morris? The degradation of whatever is fine in civilization by the rising proletariat (as novelist George Gissing seemed to fear)? The gradual equalization of income by Fabian methods? The revolutionary overthrow of the class society, believed inevitable by the new Marxists?

Elizabeth Robins Pennell recalls (some forty years later) what the gatherings at William Morris's at Hammersmith were like in 1885:

Labour was not overwhelmingly in evidence. . . . We began to suspect that socialists could boast an aristocracy when through the door communicating with the house Morris and his daughter, Miss May Morris, would appear with something of state, accompanied by favoured "comrades", usually Halliday Sparling, whom Miss Morris afterwards married, and George Bernard Shaw, young, virtually unknown—though that he was ever unknown seems today impossible.

The speaking, with the exception of Shaw's, was not good, not stimulating. Morris was charmingly picturesque, short, sturdy, bearded, in his blue reefer suit and blue shirt not unlike a sea captain off duty. His thick curly hair was massed above his forehead and always in confusion because of his habit of running his hands through it in moments of excitement, and oftener than not he was excited. He was weak in argument. In amiable mood, his retort to the straying sheep might be, "My comrade does not believe it in his heart." But, as a rule, he lost his temper and said nasty things. At one long-remembered meeting he worked himself up to the verge of apoplexy, calling his opponent every possible bad name, lost his voice in the process and did not recover it all evening. Radford talked like the condescending university man. Sparling like a romantic schoolgirl. Walker could not speak and wisely did not. The working men and clerks, overpowered by their superior leaders, seldom opened their mouths. Walter Crane occasionally appeared, had his place with the elect, but he was, if anything, the worst speaker of them all. Shaw had it his own way and made the most of it.

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He was amazingly clever, logical, paradoxical, fluent, forcing you to listen to him, though seldom to agree with him. We had never heard of him before, were entirely unprejudiced, but it struck us that he was talking for the practice it gave rather than from interest in socialism. We may have been mistaken. Morris asked us to supper after the meetings, apparently only a select few of the comrades being admitted to his beautiful eighteenth-century dining room with the Rossettis on the walls. Sometimes we went home with Shaw in the Underground—he did not live far from us—arguing all the way back. . . .⁴²

Not all of the socialist agitation was in artistic surroundings, and not all of it had so high an intellectual tone! In the same year, the Social Democratic Federation, claiming to be “the only Socialist organization in this country”, issued a clarion call to the workers:

We come before you as Revolutionists, that is, as men and women who wish to see the basis of society changed. . . .

Decent and happy life for all lies ahead of us, while all around is mere squalor, disorder, discontent, and the failure of all the hopes of civilization. Come out from these dreary ruins of decaying systems, and march with us towards the new Social Order of the World.⁴³

This was H. M. Hyndman’s organization, but many well-known socialist names were signatories, including, as treasurer, that of William Morris. Shortly after issuing these brave words the organization foolishly accepted money from the Conservatives to run two candidates in London to split the opposition vote. Between them the SDF candidates got only fifty-nine votes. Typically, scandalized brethren withdrew to form the Socialist League, and Morris further retired to the “Hammersmith Branch”. Though in 1890 the SDF could still claim to be the oldest and largest socialist body in Britain, and though they declared themselves ever ready to take charge of the coming Revolution, they could never secure the election of a single candidate to any office. It was left to the despised Fabian Society to make a lasting socialist influence in Britain, and this story is

already ably told by Anne Fremantle in *This Little Band of Prophets* (Allen & Unwin, 1960).

In spite of impotence at the polls, Hyndman's Marxism posed a real threat for Londoners—or at any rate many thought it did. Great Britain had the largest monopoly of land in the Western world, he pointed out. There was here the largest concentration of capital in any one class, and a rigid separation between the classes. It was almost impossible for a poor man to break out of his class or even to enjoy justice. Furthermore the political power was concentrated in the hands of the non-producing classes. All this in a country which was completely dependent on outside sources for food! "Now here, surely, is the making altogether of a very pretty overturn if once the working classes understand their position. . . . Still you hear the old fateful answer, it will last our time. I say it will not."⁴⁴

And there were increasing evidences that the workers could indeed be aroused. In July 1884 a crowd of 5,000 in Hyde Park were incited to some disorder by the firebrand labour leader, John Burns, speaking for the SDF. Throughout 1885 crowds became restive. *Today* reports at least one instance where socialist speakers in St. James's Park were moved on by the police and a crowd of some 1,500 men followed from the Park to the Embankment where they listened earnestly and patiently for nearly an hour.⁴⁵ There are numerous and conflicting accounts of the two major riots. At the Sugar Bounty Meeting in Trafalgar Square on Monday, 8 February 1886, a huge crowd of the unemployed gathered to protest against the closing down of the sugar refineries. The Fair Trade League sponsored the gathering, but the SDF, thinking the Fair Traders somewhat anti-socialist, called a counter-demonstration. The police, sensing trouble, asked the SDF to move to Hyde Park. They agreed, Burns leading them with a red flag. Shaw, in his account, thinks that the police were given confusing orders and proceeded to *The Mall* rather than to Pall Mall. Hyndman assumes the Fair Traders were mostly paid demonstrators and were glad to join what looked like a mob. In any case the police were not in control when the mob moved down the street of rich men's clubs. The club members made the natural mistake of crowding to the windows. Stones flew, windows smashed. Some of the

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higher-spirited looted a few shops. London was suddenly frightened of a socialist uprising, in response to which the Mansion House Relief Fund (for the unemployed) rose within two days from 30,000 to 75,000 pounds. Hyndman, who knew what a small handful of organized Socialists there really were in London, was vastly amused at the headlines: "London in Danger from Socialist Plot" and "75,000 Socialists Marching on West End". Four of the leaders, including Hyndman and Burns, stood trial for sedition. Hyndman pleaded the case (delayed till April) and secured an acquittal.⁴⁶

The uprisings continued into 1887. Trafalgar Square continued to be used by groups of poor people, some of whom slept there. Sometimes they were organized into small processions of protest. Occasionally they were broken up. On 23 October 1887 a large crowd went from the Square to a service in Westminster Abbey. On the 28th a deputation from the Christian Socialist Guild of St. Matthew addressed the men from "between the lions". The meeting passed the usual resolutions, which were submitted to the President of the Local Government Board, who said he was powerless to act on such matters and refused to be interviewed. On 7 November the Guild was joined at the Square by the English Land Restoration League. Thereupon the authorities closed it to further meetings.

The Rev. Stewart Headlam, an officer both of the Guild of St. Matthew and of the Land Restoration League, gave the Commissioner of Police written notice that in spite of the restrictions placed on Trafalgar Square, certain of their members would speak there on 11 November. Promptly at 1 p.m. the meeting began. In three minutes a Mr. Saunders had been arrested. Headlam tried to read a resolution and get himself arrested too, but the canny police, obviously under orders not to bring in the clergyman, simply pushed him aside. The Square was cleared.

This was signal enough for all the free-speech groups in London—and "free speech" was about the only topic on which many of them could agree. The Metropolitan Radical Federation had further reason for wanting to challenge the decree. It had been in the process of protesting against the imprisonment of William O'Brien, an Irish M.P., for his differences with the government's Irish policy, and had likewise been denied the use

of the Square. Representatives from most of the Radical clubs of London, including the Fabians, the SDF, and the Socialist League, met on Saturday to plan the march. On Sunday, the 13th, with W. T. Stead demanding "To the Square!" four columns formed, supposedly to converge on Nelson's Pillar. William Morris, Annie Besant, and Shaw were in one, Cunninghame Graham and John Burns in another. The police did not wait for the planned convergence. They turned back the columns separately, using truncheons. Burns and Graham were battered and arrested. Shaw nominated Mrs. Besant for honours as well. He himself melted into the onlookers and arrived at the Square separately and unharmed. There were perhaps a hundred casualties. One, possibly two, fatalities could be charged to the fray. The participants promptly labelled the day "Bloody Sunday"—perhaps just a bit over-dramatically.⁴⁷

But then, dramatization was both their method and their weapon. Nearly a month later when the hapless unknown law copyist died from injuries received in the mêlée, the coroner immediately claimed the body to forestall a public uprising. But Annie Besant organized a public funeral nonetheless. Apparently the victim had been only an onlooker, but he was nominated for martyrdom. The silent cortège moved through the street led by Stewart Headlam, who officiated. The dead man's name was Alfred Linnell. Nothing else is known of him.

Those who opposed orthodoxy, especially those with socialist leanings, gathered under the banner of Materialism; meaning, of course, that their first concern was with the betterment of people's lives on this planet, the alleviation of physical and mental anguish, the building of a better society. One finds, even within the Church, terms like "Material Christianity" which must have seemed paradoxical to the traditional elders. Shaw, late in life, dubbed them "World Betterers".

It was customary for their enemies in the Church to turn the meaning of the word around, and brand them "materialist", meaning, in this context, that they had abandoned spiritual values for material ones. Nothing more clearly illustrates how poorly the Establishment understood its adversaries. "It would

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be difficult to find in the long list of eminent materialists," Moncure Conway wrote, "a single gross or sensual character. English materialists have been known to us as men especially consecrated to ideas." Conway, it is true, was looking back on an earlier generation, specifically to Robert Owen and the old Chartists. Yet what he said was equally true of the leading dissidents of his own time.

. . . giving up life and fortune in the pursuit of an ideal society . . . such men are fairly followed today by the men of science, and the positivists and the secularists—men of plain living and high thinking, almost ascetic in their self-denial, and ever dreaming of higher education, of co-operation, and other schemes for the moral, intellectual, or social advancement of mankind. Such are the men for whom Christian prelates in their palaces sigh, deploring, amid their luxury, the gross materialism of the times!⁴⁸

Indeed, from our position beyond the middle of the twentieth century, one might accuse these valiant people of almost any fatuity, but not of cynicism. Edward Bellamy's utopian novel, *Looking Backward*, though American, was discussed in every meeting hall in London. "No part of it," the author wrote as a postscript, "is believed to be better supported by indications of probability than the implied prediction that the dawn of a new era is already near at hand, and that the full day will swiftly follow. . . . Our children will surely see it, and we, too, who are already men and women, if we deserve it by our faith and by our works."⁴⁹ Standing, as she thought, amid crumbling institutions, Annie Besant had no difficulty in looking to the day when "man's destiny is in his own hands, with no God to hinder, no devil to destroy", or from the midst of physical squalor picturing housing for the future workers, "sun-lighted and breeze-swept . . . rooms fair with harmonious colour", and a social order which would include "wise training of the mind and body . . . when on all fell the duty of work . . . given joyously . . . leisure made priceless by education . . . music, drama, art . . . whatever life can yield of beauty, of joy, of love."⁵⁰ Beatrice Webb found two tenets united in this mid-Victorian trend of thought and feeling: "There was a current belief in the scientific method, in

that intellectual synthesis of observation and experiment, hypothesis and verification, by means of which alone all mundane problems were to be solved. And added to this belief in science was the consciousness of a new motive: the transference of the emotion of self-sacrificing service from God to man."⁵¹

Winwood Reade, whose widespread influence in *The Martyrdom of Man* we have already observed, carried this faith in science to its apogee. After surveying all of human experience under the four separate headings of War, Religion, Liberty, and Intellect, he concluded that "Supernatural Christianity is false. God-worship is idolatry. Prayer is useless. The soul is not immortal. There are no rewards and there are no punishments in a future state. It now remains to be considered whether it is right to say so."⁵² Predictably he reasons that it is, since facing the truth promotes intellectual growth, and this will be necessary to face what is to come.

And what is to come must strike us now as surprisingly prophetic. He predicted three long-overdue inventions which would change the nature of life: 1. a "motive force" which would take the place of steam and other cumbersome contrivances; 2. "aerial locomotion" which would annihilate distance and extinguish national differences; 3. the manufacture of food by simple chemical means at a trifling cost. These developments would make the earth blossom, but they would also make it too small, so that man would have to explore the universe for other homes, looking back on "this star as their fatherland".⁵³ This was the most often quoted passage of the book, and it included as well predictions of social and moral advances which were naturally to accompany scientific ones. For when man had conquered the outer world, he would subdue the evils within him. He would abolish idleness and stupidity, he would devise world government. He would extirpate disease. He would invent immortality. "Finally men will master the forces of nature; they will become themselves architects of systems, manufacturers of worlds. Man will then be perfect; he will then be a creator; he will therefore be what the vulgar worship as a god." This vision antedates by fifty years Bernard Shaw's similar prophecy at the end of *Back to Methuselah*. Though not

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all of the religious rebels had Reade's lucidity of vision, they all had something of this faith in the final work of man as part of their motivation. "Glory to Man in the highest!" sang their poet, Swinburne, "for Man is the master of things."

Reade died at the age of thirty-seven of tuberculosis—"consumption", that omnipresent Victorian menace. Though he yearned to be a man of action, and actually penetrated the wilds of Africa, he did not physically participate in the London scene. Nevertheless, despite his youth, he was a widely known Secularist. During his last illness he was cared for by wealthy friends in a mansion at Wimbledon. Somehow a maniacal salvationist woman managed to break into his room to pray wildly over the helpless genius before she was discovered and removed. For melodrama and irony it is an image of mental torture which cannot be matched in the most florid novels of the age.

The more robust were left to pursue Reade's vision in the turbulence of London. Purely as reformers these men and women must be judged as eminently successful. In their lifetimes they helped to bring about passage of laws that marked improvement in education, trade unions, public health, workmen's housing, dangerous occupations, factory conditions, local government, tenants' rights, land purchase, public finance, extension of the franchise, and women's rights. But we are not concerned with them here primarily as reformers, but as heretics; and in this capacity their results are harder to estimate. One must ask to what extent they changed the established mind of the Western world, starting with London. It was for this grandiose end that they spilled out their vital energies. And, since few of them had any private means, they had to earn or beg their livings at the same time—as editor, printer, lawyer, teacher, minister, priest, or whatnot.

No doubt, in some measure of the Biblical sense, they were fools. They wore themselves out before their time. They were driven from their Churches. They were excommunicated. They were ridiculed. Their ostentatious organizations fell apart. They quarrelled among themselves. Those who survived were engulfed in the great wars. Yet the record, still incomplete, is not entirely one-sided. The avowed Atheist did eventually take his seat in

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Parliament. The outspoken Socialist was given his church. The controversial book on birth control was legally distributed. These were changes of mind, not merely of law. More than this, the nature of orthodoxy itself was permanently altered.

THE NON-CHRISTIANS

1 *The Secularists*

George Jacob Holyoake¹ was not equipped by nature for the role he was to play in life. The Secularist arena into which he was to be thrown demanded a hardy physique, an impervious nervous system, and, above all, a loud voice. Holyoake's voice was high-pitched and thin. In temperament he was thought of as "refined", though often petulant. His eyesight was weak, and at the age of fifty-eight he was seriously threatened with blindness. He was one of those frail men who keep miraculously rising from their sick-beds to outlive all their contemporaries. He trained his voice until it was clear and tolerably pleasant to listen to ("a triumph of art over nature," Malcolm Quin declared). He faced, and often disarmed, the most formidable debaters of his day. His life nearly spanned the century between Waterloo and Sarajevo.

The story of the whole Victorian era is the story of self-made men. Holyoake was the eldest son of a Birmingham foundry worker, the second of thirteen children. Born in 1817, his childhood background was one of depression and labour unrest. Like many another lad of nine years, he joined his father at the foundry. He was an adult by the time of the Chartist agitation (1839) and he became an early supporter of Robert Owen.

Childhood deaths were tragically commonplace, and the loss of a sister when George Jacob was still in his teens seemed to offer final evidence of the Church's indifference to suffering. He noted that the clergy stayed within the narrow field of ecclesiastical work, and gave little heed to what would prevent death or ease pain, to reform movements that were beginning to stir. Nevertheless he retained a religious belief until his twenty-fourth year. In the meantime he pored over books till midnight

after working at the foundry all day—the only possible escape route from the treadmill existence of his peers.

Providentially his health broke down, and he was forced into a year of wandering and thinking. At the end of this he made a satisfactory and lasting marriage. Though neither he nor his new wife had any capital whatever, he decided to leave the iron-works and face the lean years to come. He gave his time to promoting Owenite Socialism and Chartism—the ill-fated demand that Parliament adopt a “charter” of six basic reforms, but he would not follow the violent lead of Feargus O’Connor. Since Robert Owen himself was strongly anti-clerical, Owenites were under government pressure to sign an oath that they were, in effect, “Protestant Rational Religionists”—whatever that might mean. Holyoake rejected such casuistry, and began organized anti-Christian activity in England.

There was not much paid employment available for such a profession. Legally an Atheist could not give evidence in court—not even against a thief who stole from him. Ironically, Holyoake was not, throughout his whole career, really an Atheist. He was, more properly, a Deist, yet he never would take refuge from the law on this point. Editorship of *The Oracle of Reason* fell vacant when its editor-founder, Charles Southwell, was arrested for blasphemy after the fourth issue and jailed for a year. Holyoake took the position, bringing with him more temperate language, at least, than his predecessor’s. He edited the paper from his home for a time, but then set out for Bristol in 1842. En route he made a speech in Cheltenham and was promptly arrested for blasphemy. He was allowed to put up bail, and went on to London. In the big city the young radical finally found friends and sympathizers, and knew that here was where his future lay.

But the charge of blasphemy had to be faced, and he insisted on pleading his own case. He returned to Gloucester, where the trial was held, and patiently tried to educate the jury for nine hours. He failed and was sentenced to six months in jail, becoming one of the early “martyrs” of the Secularist movement. As a prisoner Holyoake refused to wear prison dress, organized “classes” in the prison’s common-room, and devised ingenious arrangements of pins and thread to permit him to write in the dark. Eventually the authorities, frowning on such wholesome

activity, kept him incommunicado. His infant daughter died, and the news of this additional sorrow had to be laid upon him while he was still a prisoner. Not surprisingly, he had thoughts of suicide.

Before releasing him, in February 1843, the authorities counselled him to acknowledge a Deity and to abandon Socialism. Instead he returned to Cheltenham and repeated the words that had caused his imprisonment. The case had received wide publicity, and the handling of it had been severely censured in the Press. The magistrates now thought it the better part of valour to look the other way. It was, as we shall see, not the last case of blasphemy in England, but Holyoake had in effect won an important victory for free speech.

He now began to give attention to a movement that was to be more permanent and more influential in British life than either Chartism or Robert Owen's brand of Socialism—Co-operation. He was briefly associated with the experimental community in Hampshire called Queenswood, which was actually in operation only a year, 1844-45. The seeds of the Co-operative Movement were sown in Queenswood, however, and Holyoake was destined to help nurture it throughout his lifetime—as well as to be its historian. Co-operation and Secularism became for him alternate passions. Whenever the hurly-burly of Secularism overwhelmed him, he could find solace in the more orderly progress and economic growth of the Co-ops.

Up to the age of thirty-two he pursued some formal studies in the hope of getting a degree; but with three children, and a precarious existence in London as editor and lecturer, he abandoned that dream. A gift enabled him to found and edit *The Reasoner* from 1845 to 1861, through which he promoted what he called "Rational Religion". In addition, by 1848 he and his associates were maintaining half a dozen lecturing centres in London. Using these halls, he embarked on a series of debates with clergymen, drawing sizeable crowds. When more conventional editors were scandalized at his denunciations of the Church, he paid them personal visits, leaving them, as often as not, smiling and more tolerant. He made and retained a number of clerical friends, including Joseph Parker, a then young and unknown minister with whom he debated in Banbury for three

The Non-Christians

nights in 1855. Years afterwards the great Nonconformist preacher was to recall,

From the beginning to the end Mr. Holyoake did not utter one offensive word, nor was there one offensive tone in the eloquent delivery of what he had to say.

Parker later watched Holyoake debate with an unnamed clergyman:

If I could have heard the debate without seeing the disputants or hearing their words—that is to say, if I could have judged only by the spirit and temper of the men—I should have said that the Christian was the infidel and the so-called infidel the Christian. When the Christian advocate sat down, I had no conception of the meaning of Christianity, but when Mr. Holyoake resumed his seat I had a tolerably complete view of the theory and purpose of Secularism.²

Throughout his life Holyoake remained “unique among the militant Freethinkers in the number of cordial friendships he had with clergymen and the terms in which they spoke to him.”³

Freethinkers in London at the time were mainly intellectuals. It was Holyoake's aim to appeal to the working men. He coined the word “Secularism” to avoid the negative concept of “Atheism”. He helped found the London Secular Society about 1853, and remained its leader until Charles Bradlaugh arrived on the scene in 1857. Thereafter there was constant conflict between these two divergent personalities. The impression given by Holyoake's biographer, McCabe, is of a young and brash Bradlaugh, and a gentle, long-suffering Holyoake. Yet Bradlaugh, with all the physical attributes that Holyoake lacked, no doubt with something of a messianic view of himself, and the power to stir great crowds, must have felt that the older leader, respected as he was, stood in the way of the great work to be done—which was, quite naturally, the complete destruction of Christendom. Holyoake, on the other hand, must often have been genuinely offended by Bradlaugh's all-or-nothing positions. It is natural to suppose that Bradlaugh's sheer youth was annoying. After all, Holyoake had been in the chair when Bradlaugh gave his first Secularist lecture at the age of seventeen—on “The Past,

Present, and Future of Theology"! And Holyoake's pose of graciousness may not always have been without rancour. His later ION cartoons on Bradlaugh are savagely barbed.

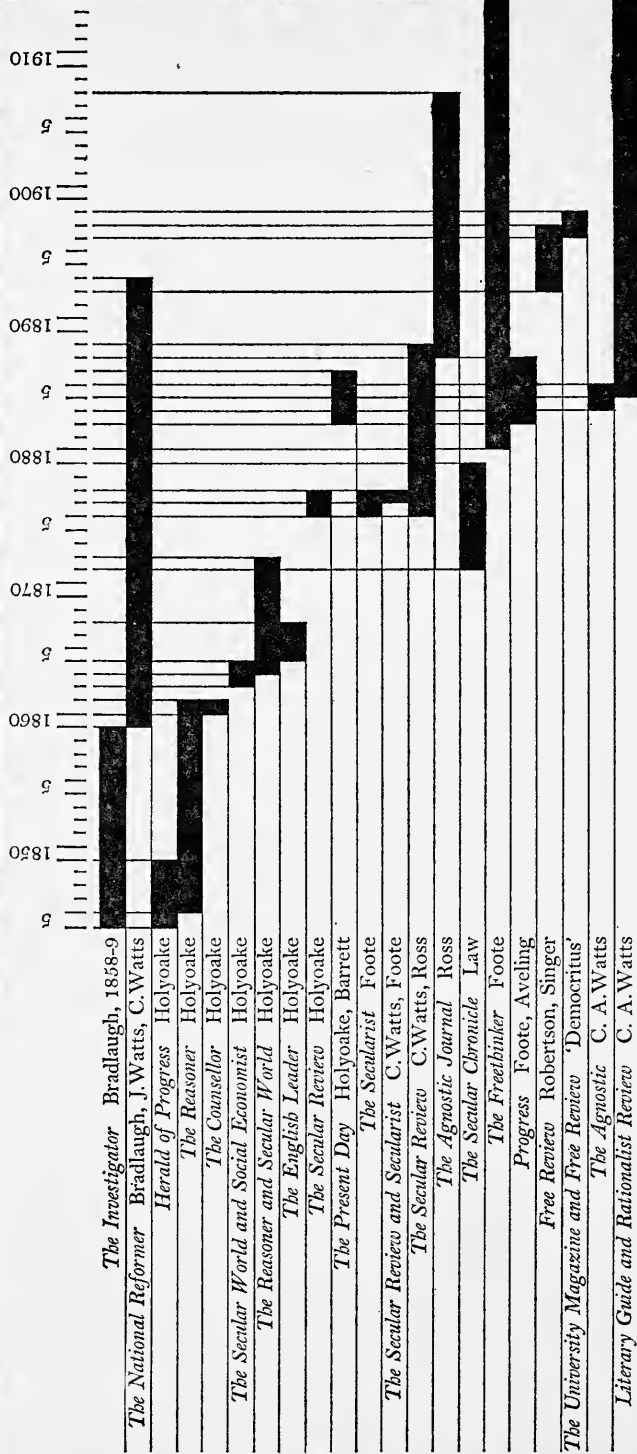
In any case, in 1858, after a public debate, Charles Bradlaugh was elected President of the London Secular Society. The young leader also edited *The Investigator* for about a year, then dropped it to found the most influential of all the Secular magazines, *The National Reformer*, in 1860.

In 1866 Bradlaugh launched the National Secular Society. Holyoake sympathizers argued that the new organization under Bradlaugh should call itself "Atheistic" and leave the word "Secular" for the original group. It was to no avail. Holyoake, in one of his periods of poor health, also lost *The Reasoner* in 1861, and the next year left his newer effort, *The Counsellor*, to write for *The National Reformer*, so that Bradlaugh could now claim, "One Paper, One Party". But the association could not last. It ended with a dispute over the terms of the contract. Holyoake won the arbitration, but left the *Reformer* and set out on an entirely new set of editorial experiences.

When one looks back to the many Holyoake publications (by actual count at least eight), one is forced to conclude that they have a dreary similarity, a style meant to be casual and persuasive, and a flavour of having been written from cover to cover by the editor. These observations would be equally valid, of course, for most of the ephemera of the period. The multitude of journals would have been impossible if each one could not have been totally accomplished in someone's converted sitting-room. *The Secular World and Social Economist* was the Holyoake paper for 1863. It became *The Reasoner and Secular World* in 1865.

In contrast *The National Reformer*, though always dominated by Bradlaugh, did achieve some professional distinction as a magazine. It was often pompous, reflecting Bradlaugh's great desire for respectability. But its reportage was thorough. It carried speeches and committee reports in full, and London's most complete "Guide to the Lecture Room". It was, so to speak, *The Times* of the Secularist movement. Furthermore, it retained its quality when Bradlaugh was ill or on lecture tours to America. Not so with Holyoake, who had not Bradlaugh's (and Mrs. Besant's) organizing gifts.

Periodicals of the Secularist Movement 1845-1914 not including annuals



Politically Holyoake was not a tactician, and he made many mistakes. One was running for Parliament in 1868 as an "Independent Labour". He was roundly defeated. Another was debating with Bradlaugh for the second time in 1870. Bradlaugh was by that time thirty-six, practised and razor-sharp, one of the most formidable debaters in England. After that the dominant image for Secularism in Great Britain was Charles Bradlaugh. But Holyoake—and many others—had further roles to play, and we shall return to them.

In the early seventies the Secularist activities were beginning to attract outside attention. The peripatetic Reverend Charles Davies found the infidels, often at some trouble, in the East End, mainly at Hackney. He did not go in clerical garb. In fact, he confessed to dressing in his more shoddy suits and hats so as to attract less attention. At first the meetings were poorly attended and rarely started on time. Unlike the audiences he had found at the Dialectical Society, there were few women. Respectable orthodox people of London, he declared, would find this world of the Secularists as strange as life on another planet. Not only strange, but downright offensive. They smelled. They had probably heard, he decided, that cleanliness was next to godliness, and were simply behaving like good atheists. He might have added that they took themselves with enormous seriousness, and the good Reverend brought to them, all unknown, a merciful and irrepressible glint of humour. Speeches were long and were always answered—sometimes at equal length—from the floor.

Crowds grew with the era of Bradlaugh, and the gatherings became more exciting. Davies attended the 1870 debates between Holyoake and Bradlaugh, shrewdly noting that the differences were of the same order and depth as existed between the Catholics and Protestants. The eminent American Unitarian, Charles W. Wendte, was also curious enough to look in on Science Hall when he visited London in the early seventies. He found the room small, not too clean, brilliantly lighted with gas jets, "oppressive with foul air". The audience comprised, he thought, mostly mechanics and clerks, neatly dressed and intelligent-looking, regarding Bradlaugh as a superior being,

applauding his every utterance, laughing at every jibe at religion, the Bible, the Church, the upper classes, and the established order. "We were not sorry to escape . . . from the heat, excitement, and tumult within to the coolness and calm of the street. Yet we felt that as one of the factors of social and ethical life in England Mr. Bradlaugh and his school of opinion were to be taken into account."⁴

Malcolm Quin remembered the excitement of those days, too, when Secularism was developing all the appurtenances of a great organization—leaders, apostles, newspapers, lecture halls, and internal disputes. Quin helped supply hymns for the Secularists, Positivists, Ethical Culturists, and others who had broken with dogmatic Christianity. These people still "liked to have their moral sentiments expressed in vague general statements which committed them to nothing in particular. . . . People who believed in nothing else believed in hymns."⁵

There were other formal remnants that clung to them. Austin Holyoake (George Jacob's brother) and Charles Watts assembled *The Secularist's Manual* for the more ritualistic brethren. This included ceremonies for the Naming of Infants, as well as for Marriage and Burial. All of the rites were long-winded and sentimental in the extreme. It is impossible to imagine either Bradlaugh or G. J. Holyoake participating. At the Naming, the parents were harangued with pages of pompous banalities ("For in the summer of childhood, when the heart leaps with joy, when innocence beams on the cheek and hope sparkles in the eye . . . and when the evening of his existence has arrived, may he obtain consolation from the reflection. . . .") Secular societies were not licensed to perform marriages, so it was assumed that the legal ceremonies would be performed at the Registrar's Court, and then the party would gather at the Hall for the additional celebration. The couple apparently was to stand at some Secularist substitute for an altar while the most threadbare advice was lavished on them. ("We urge each not to be the first by whom a harsh word is spoken, nor the last to offer the hand of reconciliation. . . . So live, that when the evening of life arrives. . . .") For the burial, much praise for the deceased is included in the printed sermon, all couched in heroic terms that must have sounded all the more incongruous when spoken

The Secularists

beside the grave of a humble worker! For the end of any service Austin Holyoake suggests a "Dismission" of three incredible stanzas, ending with:

Farewell, dear friends! Adieu, adieu
Till we again unite;
The social system keep in view:
Farewell, dear friends! Goodnight.⁶

No wonder Davies found, in attending these meetings, some hope for the Church!

Another Secular practice of unexpected charm is the issuance of annual Almanacks. These were begun in 1870, and for a few years after 1878 there were two—representing a split in the organization. They maintained the traditional old-fashioned almanack arrangement, month by month and week by week, each day with its little motto or saying, each month with its pithy excerpt. The sources were, as you would guess, purely secular: Shelley, Darwin, Ben Franklin, Tom Paine. Occasionally a Unitarian or a Quaker was admitted. The birthdays marked were not of the saints. And there was always a review of the past year's news with heavy editorial colouring. They were not on good paper, and few of them survive.

The grim visage of Charles Bradlaugh and his unrelenting pressure as a mature orator are better understood when placed against his early circumstances.⁷ He was a native of London's East End. He did not need to find his arena; he grew up within it. Bradlaugh pictured his father, in spite of his differences with him, as a faithful clerk with some humanity. Charles had formal education of a sort between the ages of seven and eleven at three different schools. Then he went to work.

The villain of his youth was the rector of his family's church at St. Peter's, Hackney, the Rev. J. G. Packer. The rector had selected young Charles as a teacher for Sunday School, and set him to studying the Thirty-nine Articles and the Gospels. But on Sunday afternoons there was much informal debating at Bonner's Fields, and when Charles, defending the creed and faith, found himself out-debated by a Freethinker, he innocently took his doubts to his spiritual adviser, who promptly suspended him from the Sunday School position and saw to it that he was

steadfastly watched over at home lest he should fall into the clutches of the devil. Later biographers play down the incident and assume that he was headed for Freethought in any case. But it served as an excuse, at least, for leaving home at the age of sixteen; and I do not doubt that the image of Packer remained with him throughout life as the prototype of a "Christian".

Even as a sixteen-year-old independent coal merchant the label of "infidel" placed him in economic difficulties, but this did not deter him the following year from giving the Secularist lecture already referred to. On leaving home he was first sheltered by a kind old Chartist by the name of Jones. Later he was taken into the household of Mrs. Sharples Carlile, common-law widow of Richard Carlile, famous among the radicals as the man who had been imprisoned for reprinting Thomas Paine. Unused to kindness, and in the midst of a difficult adolescence, the young man fell hopelessly in love with Mrs. Carlile's daughter, Hypatia. Evidently the passion was not reciprocal, but Bradlaugh reserved her name for one of his own daughters. Friends of the Carliles took an interest in the self-reliant young man, and under their tutelage he began a study of languages—Hebrew, Greek, French, and Arabic. Eventually he achieved some competence in French and Hebrew. He had the attributes of a scholar—patience, industry, memory—but not the opportunities. Holyoake, too, was a helpful friend in these difficult years.

The hiatus with the Carliles was brief. Charles could not get out of debt and in 1850 some Freethinkers offered him a subscription. This acknowledgment of his poverty so shocked him that he enlisted in the Seventh Dragoon Guards. He spent three years as a private in Ireland where he saw cruelty and starvation even beyond what he had known in London. In some miraculous fashion he managed at the same time to study for the law. In one of the few instances of pure good fortune in a strife-filled life, a great-aunt's legacy allowed him to buy his way out of the Guards in 1853.

The good fortune did not follow him in his marriage to Susannah Hooper. Though good-natured she became a dipsomaniac, and after fifteen trying years she at last went to live with her father, taking her two daughters with her and leaving a son at school. Left behind with her husband were the financial

burdens. Earning about 1,000 pounds per year, mostly for lecturing, he managed tawdry lodgings in the East End and supported his wife and daughters in the country.

A burden of a different sort was his brother, William, twelve years his junior. Addicted to drink, William persistently lost the jobs Charles found for him. In 1872 he served a jail term for embezzlement. This was embarrassment enough, but it was almost preferable to his behaviour after Moody and Sankey, in one of their 1875 rallies, "saved" him. Thereafter he figured as an evangelist, blatantly capitalizing on his brother's name, and publicly praying for his salvation. Bradlaugh maintained his usual stoical silence.

In point of fact Bradlaugh never ceased to be an easy mark for those in need. Off the platform, with his defences down, he had a courtliness and courtesy that surprised those who had known him previously only under fire. He had met James Thompson, for instance, in his army days, and for years the morbid poet lived with him. Bradlaugh patiently put up with his fits of drunkenness and illness. What is more surprising he published *The City of Dreadful Night* serially in *The National Reformer*, though it was manifestly out of place there. The *Reformer* was not a literary organ, and it is doubtful whether Bradlaugh recognized its literary merits. It was certainly far superior to most Secularist verses, but it was very long, and one wonders if Bradlaugh really read it before handing it over to the typesetters. It extends through the issues of 22 March, 12 April, 26 April, and 17 May 1874. Bradlaugh may well have understood such lines of Thompson's as

Surely I write not for the hopeful young,
Or those who deem their happiness of worth
Or such as pasture and grow fat among
The shows of life . . .

but nothing could be further remote from the stalwart optimism of the *Reformer* than this long paean of despair. He was simply being kind to one of Society's more talented victims.

How is it, then, that when the time came for him to take over the Secular Society, he could not project a similar charity towards Holyoake? I do not think it was merely a question of rivalry for

leadership. The verbatim report of the 1870 debate was printed, and it reveals quite clearly that Holyoake stood astride the road Bradlaugh was determined to travel. For Holyoake the basis of Secularism was Materialism. One's judgments were made on the evidence of the material world of science and not on supernaturalism. But this did not necessarily mean that a Secularist had to be, strictly speaking, an Atheist. But for Bradlaugh any touch of deism or theism was *de facto* a distortion of judgment. The first step towards emancipation was the clearing away of all religion. For years Bradlaugh's pen name had been "Iconoclast", and his motto, "Thorough". It is true that as the debate wore on into the second night Bradlaugh became arrogant, making it clear that since Secularism had become identified with him, the word ought to mean what *he* meant—with Holyoake reminding him that *Chambers's Encyclopædia* had come to him, not Bradlaugh, to write the entry on Secularism!⁸ A careful student of the movement, Walter David Nelson, adds the further observation that it was Holyoake's desire (and a facet of his personality) to unite liberal Theists, Deists, Spiritualists, etc. under one banner, whereas for Bradlaugh any Secularist who did not eventually become an Atheist was an imbecile.⁹ "My argument was," Holyoake maintained years later, "that a man could judge a house . . . without ever knowing who was the architect or landlord, and if as occupant he received no application for rent, he ought in gratitude to keep the place in good repair. . . . The least we can do is to improve the estate as our acknowledgment of the advantage we enjoy. This is Secularism."¹⁰ At such an image of tranquillity one can almost hear Bradlaugh snort.

Bradlaugh, like all born leaders, could be magnanimous with rivals provided things were going his way. After the debate Charles Watts (obviously at Bradlaugh's prompting) offered Holyoake one of the vice-presidencies of the Society. (It was declined.) And at the instance of Holyoake's serious illness in 1875, when he was threatened with blindness, Bradlaugh helped to raise a subscription of £2,254, invested to produce more than £100 annually. Of this, £285 came directly from appeals in *The National Reformer*. No one imagined then that Holyoake had another thirty years of service to give to his various causes.

In the sixties, when Bradlaugh was still in his twenties, he matured as a platform personality amid some of the most riotous scenes imaginable. It was assumed that he was the Devil himself, so there was no point in fair play. He was mobbed at Wigan twice—for he always returned to places where the antagonism was the greatest. On one of these occasions a local clergyman was the leader of a mob which broke the windows, threw lime into the hall, and poured water down the ventilators. Sometimes he was hooted at and stoned. Local landladies, on determining his identity, were likely to cancel his room. Sometimes, as at Guernsey, he had to post his own bills. His lectures were broken up. But he learned to handle himself and handle the crowds. In the end they usually listened, as he complimented them on their Christian behaviour. He enjoyed doing battle, and he enjoyed winning.¹¹

Small wonder that at the height of his powers he inspired either awe or fear. Wendte found him powerful and fearless, but harsh, irreverent, and arrogant; on the whole “an instrument for enlightenment and social and political justice”.¹² Once again Davies proves one of the most useful observers. About 1873, just before Bradlaugh was joined by Annie Besant, Davies went to the Hall of Science (Old Street, St. Luke’s) to hear Bradlaugh’s discourse on “The Existence of God”. This was quite different from his earlier probing into the East End. The hall was full a quarter of an hour before the lecture was scheduled to begin, and extra chairs and standing room were being apportioned. There were tradesmen, artisans, sailors, navvies and labourers, all of whom had paid twopence or fourpence admission. The applause on the great man’s entrance was thunderous. He appeared to Davies as a “colossus”. (Quin said he was “built like a Titan”. The fact was that he was powerfully built, but only seemed like a giant on the platform.) The lecture on this occasion was preceded by a “naming ceremony”. Bradlaugh did not use the ceremony described in *The Secularist’s Manual*.

He simply took the child in his arms, pronounced the name “Elizabeth”, kissed it, and handed it back to the parents, hoping the child would have no cause to regret the association.

Bradlaugh’s speeches were not short. He did not hesitate to read long passages from various works to support his points. Davies

took occasion "to look around and notice the gaze of that vast audience riveted upon the lecturer. Truly for good or ill that man sways a vast power."¹³ The speaker handled the questions and discussion expertly and with gallantry. The hall afterwards was scattered with small informal discussion groups.

This was Bradlaugh's own audience. They considered him one of them and looked on him with pride and admiration. All his life he laboured to be equally accepted by the gentility—for there was a strain of snobbishness in his make-up. Secretly he struggled with his speech and his manners as valiantly as ever Eliza Doolittle was to do in a later drama. He achieved marvels, but his victory was never quite complete. Olive Schreiner reported to Havelock Ellis, "I went to St. James's Hall last night. Every fibre of my being revolted against old Bradlaugh, and I wanted to like him."¹⁴ She was not alone in her reaction.

Perhaps he loved the smell of blood too obviously to allow the gentility ever to be wholly at ease with him. For it was in debate that he excelled. Quin described him as lying in wait for his opponent, all nerves, with an intense and watchful eye, eager to pounce upon a chronological error or a slip in argument. Both sides recognized—and expected—denunciation, sarcasm, and invective. At the end of the debate, each took his share of the gate and parted amicably.¹⁵

A Rev. A. J. Harrison debated with Bradlaugh on several occasions, and seems to have been one of his worthier opponents. His plea, after one encounter, reveals his hesitation about continuing.

I do not say that you are not always scholarly, but I do mean that you are always sarcastic, and, pardon me, rather loud. Now I cannot equal you in these two points. Not in the first for I have not your power of wit; not in the second for I have not your power of lungs.

It is known, however (Harrison continued), that Bradlaugh *can* be as gentle as a dove when he likes.

I am a very nervous debater (You have no idea how nervous!) and the brilliance of your sarcasm, so to speak, dazzles my eyes; and the force of your voice stuns my ears. So pray consent for once to argue without sarcasm or noise.¹⁶

But Bradlaugh would not make promises which he knew he could not keep.

The roster of his debates is imposing, but the range seems limited. As a sample:

“On God, Man, and the Bible”, a three-nights discussion with the Rev. Dr. Baylee in Liverpool, 1860.

“What does Christian Theism teach?” a two-nights discussion with Rev. A. J. Harrison, London, 1872.

“Is it reasonably to worship God?” with the Rev. R. A. Armstrong, 1878.

“Eternal Torment”, a written debate with the Rev. John Lightfoot in *The National Reformer*, 1876.¹⁷

Obviously some of these platform exercises were endurance contests both for the participants and the audiences. George Standring humorously reports one such in *The Secular Chronicle* in 1875.¹⁸ The antagonist on this occasion was the Rev. Brewin Grant, and it was to go on solidly for six nights. A Rev. Mr. Loveridge of Bethnal Green was in the chair at the South Place Chapel. Not surprisingly the house fell off somewhat after the first night, particularly since Mr. Grant did not appear to be a strong opponent. Standring gives a picture of Grant calmly eating strawberries during Bradlaugh's innings, but when his own turn came he was quite unable to handle the heckling. (It must be understood that at South Place the audience would not favour orthodoxy, and that in any case by 1875 audiences came to enjoy the performance of Bradlaugh.) At one point Bradlaugh rose to quiet the house for his opponent, but the chairman ruled this was an undue liberty, and thereafter havoc reigned uninterrupted. On the fifth night the debate came to a halt when it was announced that the noted Secularist, W. J. Ramsey, had been knocked down and stunned on the steps outside. Bradlaugh immediately rose to offer a fifty-pound reward for any evidence as to who was responsible. He then departed, leaving Grant attempting to carry on above the tumult. Bradlaugh's final undelivered speech was printed in *The National Reformer*.

Of a different order was his later debate with H. M. Hyndman on “Will Socialism benefit the English People?” with Bradlaugh taking the negative. Here Bradlaugh was on much shakier ground, as his knowledge of Socialism was really rather primi-

tive. Hyndman was a sturdier opponent, too, than the usual clergyman volunteered through the Christian Evidence Society. Between three and four thousands gathered in St. James's Hall, and the eminent Positivist, Professor E. S. Beesly, was the chairman. Yet most of the Press ignored it. (The space was taken, growled the editor of *Progress*, by Lord Churchill and General Booth.) Bradlaugh took the general line that capitalism could not be abandoned because all good work was done for gain; but Hyndman was able to cite an impressive list of accomplishments not done for monetary reward. On the other hand when Bradlaugh asked how anyone with unpopular views—like himself—could find a voice under a Socialist régime when all means of communication would be in the hands of a powerful state, Hyndman was noticeably evasive.¹⁹ Hyndman, though he found Bradlaugh's views on this subject absurd, admitted his power over the audience.

Bradlaugh was much more convincing on the platform than he was in print. His written style was weighed down with legalistic phraseology, displayed proudly, as if to prove his hard-won erudition. Yet the devotees bought whatever was signed by the master's name and was on sale in the lecture hall. This included, in addition to a brief *Autobiography*, such items of near scurrility as *John Brown and the Queen*, and *Mr. Bradlaugh's Letter to the Prince of Wales*. Bradlaugh was an outspoken Republican, and was as anti-Queen as he was anti-God. He wrote to the future King Edward with the familiarity of a brother Mason, in tones of insulting irony, explaining that the end of the monarchy was near at hand. Such pamphlets would have been received with little alarm in a London that was already glutted with pamphlets of every description, except for the author's rising prestige with the East End crowds. Hyndman, after the debate on Socialism, was struck by the exaggerated deference paid to his opponent by those around him. It gave him, he admitted, quite a shock.²⁰

There are numerous examples of his personal magnetism. Best known is his captivation of the most brilliant and personable woman in the reform movement, Mrs. Annie Wood Besant, in 1874. As Bradlaugh's vocation was, in a sense, in reaction to the Rev. Packer, Mrs. Besant's was in reaction to the religion of her

husband, the Rev. Frank Besant, whom she had married as a devout girl of twenty. The Rev. Besant was Vicar of Sibsey, a younger brother of the author, Walter Besant. At twenty-seven, after the kind of spiritual anguish that marked the maturation of so many of her Victorian contemporaries, Annie had left her husband's bed and board and was ready to turn her considerable talents over to the Secularist movement. Like Bradlaugh, she had children by her estranged spouse—a son and a daughter.

When she left Sibsey, she agreed to leave the boy with his father, and took the daughter with her. Besant agreed also to an allowance of 110 pounds a year. She was influenced considerably by the Rev. Charles Voysey, who had founded his Theistic Church in 1871. And, like almost all the Unorthodox, she found her way to the home of Moncure Conway. For a time after the break-up of her home Annie and her daughter Mabel lived with the Conways, to the delight of Conway's own three children. To tide her over, Conway gave her some translating to do, as she knew French, German, and Italian. Late in his life Conway still remembered,

Her face was beautiful, its delicate oval contours and feminine sensibility were heightened by the simplicity and sincerity which come of good breeding and culture. . . . It filled us with astonishment that a young man should be willing to part from this beautiful and accomplished wife for the sake of any creed.²¹

Malcolm Quin concurred and called her "incomparable". She had looks, youth, a full feminine voice, dark eyes in a live face, and a good mind. But she had too little humour, and was obsessed with the lure of martyrdom. The young men were carried away. Her portrait (in colours) was soon on sale in the Secularist lecture halls. Quin still had his in his old age.²²

It is difficult to say who received the more from the Bradlaugh-Besant partnership. She brought into a hitherto dour life charm, erudition, femininity, culture, devotion—and a platform personality which was a complement to his own. He was fourteen years older and had begun independent living very young. His experience in public life must have seemed reassuring to one who had been, until recently, an overprotected young woman.

He encouraged her in her public speaking, but also restrained her from "the intoxication of easily won applause".

Annie's decisions were always swift and thorough. Soon after their first meeting they began appearing together both in person and in print. It is understandable that those who did not know better should assume that they kept a common household. But they did not. All their associates seem agreed that Moncure Conway's statement was correct:

In all matters relating to sex and marriage, Bradlaugh was not merely chaste personally, but exceptionally conservative in opinion. Yet he was cruelly slandered in relation to a refined and eminent lady. The gossip was all the more cruel because, as I happen to know, these two leaders of Freethought had deliberately sacrificed their happiness for the sake of their example and the honour of their cause.²³

This did not prevent a clergyman from accusing Bradlaugh of living in "a sort of Voltaire villa" with his "squaw . . . united by a bond unblessed by priest or parson". Bradlaugh sued for libel and won, but the stories did not stop. Throughout his life he was in almost continuous litigation of one sort or another, always appearing as his own counsel, always giving any damages collected to a charitable cause, always struggling with debts.

Though they probably managed to uphold the Victorian code of honour, and though Annie eventually went her independent way, her relationship to him remained in many ways thoroughly wife-like. When Bradlaugh returned from the United States in 1875 impoverished and ill with pleurisy, she looked after both him and the movement. She was then one of thirteen vice-presidents. In a letter to the Conways near the end of 1886 she reports on intimate Bradlaugh family affairs—Hypatia's little son had died suddenly in the summer. . . . The father in the same household (Arthur Bonner) had been in bed nine weeks with typhoid fever. Hypatia's aunt, whom Annie had tended three times that year in operations for cancer, died soon after the last one.²⁴ After Bradlaugh's death, she commented that "no man was more perfect in the home. Simple in his tastes, never grumbling about food or other trifles . . . never a complaint or a

cross look . . . the very easiest man to please that any one could wish for.”²⁵

Some years after Bradlaugh's career had closed and Mrs. Besant's had shifted to India, Arthur Wing Pinero wrote *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*, a play which some commentators took as a representation of Annie Besant (Agnes Ebbsmith), Frank Besant (the Rev. Amos Winterfield) and Bradlaugh (Lucas Cleeve). So far as I know the author himself never indicated any such intention. Agnes in the play is an interesting reformer who is tempted to be also a woman, and such a struggle may be one that Annie Besant knew. But Annie, as a mature woman, would never have thrown her Bible into the fire (as Agnes does), and most certainly would not then have burned herself pulling it out again! The minister is not too clearly drawn. Cleeve is not in the least like Bradlaugh. If Pinero had a model for this role, it might more believably have been Secularist Edward Aveling.

Bradlaugh's personal spell was, as we have noted, widely cast, and he accepted his disciples as a matter of course. His early editor of *The National Reformer*, John Watts, son of a clergyman, maintained his Secularist views throughout a long and painful illness. He died at thirty-one, leaving a widow and four children, in 1866. These circumstances repeated themselves almost identically for G. J. Holyoake's younger brother, Austin, also a Bradlaugh disciple and also associated with his paper. Austin died 10 April 1874 at the age of forty-seven. He had been suffering for three years, and was quite conscious of his approaching end. One of the oldest and most shopworn of the repertory items of evangelism was the emotion-charged story of the death-bed repentance of the Atheist, the figurative snatching of the Bible from the flames. Apocryphal stories of this nature sprang up on the death of nearly every well-known Freethinker. Austin determined it should not happen in his case, and took the trouble to dictate a detailed statement to his wife only two days before he expired. Saying that he had delayed purposely until the latest possible moment, he told of his own religious upbringing as a Calvinist Methodist, "the most terrible of all sects", and his gradual emancipation through the followers of Robert Owen. Now, after twenty years of freedom from any dogma of rewards

or punishments, he found that the approach of death gave him not the slightest alarm.

I have suffered and am suffering night and day; but this has not produced the least symptom of change of opinion. No amount of bodily torture can alter a mental conviction. Those who, under pain, say they see the error of their previous belief, had never thought out the problem for themselves.²⁶

The tearful scene at the graveside, as Davies describes it, breaking down the strong man, Bradlaugh, would have surfeited even the deceased author of *The Secularist's Manual*.

With Annie Besant by his side, Bradlaugh faced the first serious test of his leadership in the movement in 1877 with the battle over *The Fruits of Philosophy*. The broad issue was freedom of the Press. The more immediate one was birth control.

Nearly a century before, Malthus, a clergyman, in his *Essay on Population* had recommended late marriages as a control of the rising population curve. Other nineteenth-century books had taken more or less candid positions on contraception. Dr. Charles Knowlton's *The Fruits of Philosophy*, which explained and advocated birth control, had been in and out of print on both sides of the Atlantic since 1833. It formed part of the stock of books in the Fleet Street House which G. J. Holyoake took over from a James Watson back in 1853 in a complicated and less-than-friendly transaction.

The Fleet Street House was a Secularist institution which came to an end in 1861, after Holyoake had patiently helped to clear it of its debts. Holyoake knew the Knowlton pamphlet was sold there, though he personally thought it "coarse". He passed the entire stock of the defunct institution to his brother, Austin. Upon Austin's death his widow sold it to the elder Charles Watts.

Watts was a printer and publisher who had for a time edited *The National Reformer*. He had learned his trade from his brother John, and inherited the shop at John's death in 1866. Charles Watts, up from Bristol twenty-four years before, was, at the time of this incident, about forty years old, an early associate of Bradlaugh and a veteran in the affairs of Secularism.

On 14 December 1876 a Bristol bookseller named Cooke was arrested for selling "obscene literature"—*The Fruits of*





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Philosophy. (It was later discovered that he had inserted some illustrations to help sales along, but this was not known to the London group at the time.) Investigation showed that the books had come from the stock controlled by Watts. As an honourable man Watts went immediately to Bristol to take responsibility as publisher. He was formally charged on 8 January 1877 and four days later committed to trial. Annie Besant at once opened an appeal for "the Charles Watts Defence Fund", and tried to persuade Watts to make it a test case for a free Press. Bradlaugh, of course, concurred.

Watts was at first willing, but the leaders of Secularism were not of one mind. Holyoake thought that defending such a work would compromise the defenders and harm the movement. More significantly Kate Watts also disapproved. She was Charles' second wife, daughter of Nottingham Freethinkers, and a person of stature in her own right in the Secular Society. She could boast that she had not been in a church till she was seventeen, and had not read a line of the Bible until after she was married. Furthermore she was still young and pretty and did not take kindly to the sudden eminence of Annie Besant in the movement. Her husband changed his plea to "guilty".

Bradlaugh thereupon severed all business connections with Watts. On 8 February Watts was fined 500 pounds and costs at the Old Bailey and was released.

After Watts's defection, Bradlaugh and Besant announced that they would reissue the pamphlet, revising it slightly in tone and style but not in content. The authorities were taken somewhat aback by this audacity, and the revised pamphlet was actually printed and sold in some quantity before the inevitable arrest took place. They were tried in the High Court under Lord Chief Justice Cockburn on 18 June 1877. Of course the trial was a sensation—as they meant it to be—with both defendants pleading their own cases. Many of their friends had felt that this was courage to the point of foolhardiness. Moncure Conway was especially concerned (rightly, it turned out) over the possible effects of the trial on Annie Besant. Bradlaugh himself was forced to confess that the opposition was more severe than any he had encountered with mere Atheism. Sex ethics was the rawest nerve of Victorian London.

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Holyoake's name, against his expressed wish, was listed as "former publisher". He was therefore subpoenaed and was obliged to testify that he had published only for Watson, that he disapproved of the uses made of the book by the Bristol purveyor, and that he had recommended its withdrawal. His appearance would not have been necessary, and it doubtless embarrassed him to advertise differences among Secularists in public. Bradlaugh and Besant wanted Charles Darwin to testify, but he begged off, and in a private letter to them confessed that he thought overpopulation a useful device in improving the species.

In the crowded court both defendants were fined 200 pounds, and Bradlaugh was sentenced to six months in prison. The pamphlet was suppressed. The total costs were 1,065 pounds. This was the outcome expected, and Bradlaugh was ready with the next move. He appealed on the grounds that the passage in the book said to be indecent had never been set forth in full. It was a technical point, but it kept him out of jail, and in February 1878 the Court of Appeal upheld him.

The results of the trial were divided. *The Fruits of Philosophy* affair was the first wide advertisement of birth control in England. The pamphlet continued to be sold. Eventually Mrs. Besant wrote and published her own *The Law of Population*. The moribund Malthusian League revived (Motto: "Prudence after Marriage") and its membership rose to 1,200.²⁷ The single-minded medical doctor, C. R. Drysdale, remained its president, and in the decade that followed, the Society accreted fourteen vice-presidents of whom Annie Besant became one. It developed an international flavour with members listed from Madrid, Paris, Madras, Naples. Through *The Malthusian* and other means of propaganda their aims were, simply: to abolish any penalties connected with free discussion of the population question; and to spread knowledge of the law of population among all people. Dr. Drysdale further invented a Medical Branch of the Malthusian League, consisting solely of physicians, the better to handle the medical Press and stimulate continuing experimentation.²⁸ The action of Bradlaugh and Besant must certainly have sped this progress.

So much for the bounty of their victory. It was not without its costs. The Rev. Frank Besant successfully made use of the

notoriety to have his daughter, Mabel, removed from Annie's custody. This, too, involved a court trial, but one in which she had to sit helpless while evidence accumulated to show how her irreligion had taken from her the proper attributes of motherhood. Mrs. Conway sat with her in court. Moncure Conway reported that she came out of the court cold and hard. "It's a pity there isn't any God," she told him; "it would do one so much good to hate him."²⁹ The child, ill with scarlet fever, was removed to her father's house, and Annie was refused any access to her. Annie lost her annual allowance, too. The vicar denied her a divorce, much as he must have cringed at the scandal into which she propelled the Besant name.

Insults to her continued. In 1879 she was "invited to resign" from the National Sunday League (which had sought her help in the first place) when Lord Thurlow took over the chairmanship from Auberon Herbert. She was refused permission to use the gardens of the Royal Botanic Society for her later studies for the stated reason that the curator's daughters also used it. In 1883 she and Alice Bradlaugh were refused admittance to the Practical Botany Class at University College, London, after being instructed to present themselves in person.³⁰

The other price exacted by *The Fruits of Philosophy* trial was the permanent split in the ranks of the Secular movement. Before this issue arose internal squabbles were more or less constant, but by careful handling the leadership was able to present at least a show of unity to the outside world. There was G. W. Foote, a young upstart (twenty-six years old at the time), leader of a "Glasgow faction", who had had the temerity to challenge Bradlaugh's leadership at the Leeds Conference of the Society in June of 1876. He was put down, of course. The Executive Committee had thereupon summoned him to appear before them "to answer certain charges"—amounting, I suppose, to insubordination. Instead Foote asked simply to resign. The Committee consented to "formally erase" his name from the rolls—apparently finding some semantic difference between this and resignation. Foote may have been one who was somewhat resentful of the "Besant influence", and Bradlaugh may have been glad for an excuse to brush the handsome and talented young widower aside, at least for the moment.³¹

Foote did the usual thing; he started a magazine, *The Secularist* (monthly) which apparently had the blessing of Holyoake. Holyoake, in the same summer, was launching his own *The Secular Review* (weekly) acknowledging his differences with *The National Reformer* (weekly), which, he implied, tended to push too hard for uniformity among Secularists. Then there was a fourth publication, *The Secular Chronicle* (weekly), run by the declamatory Mrs. Harriet Law. This stout-voiced foe of the Establishment joined with Foote in renting Cleveland Hall in Fitzroy Square as a separate Secularist hall.³²

All this may seem poor evidence of unanimity, but in fact Charles Bradlaugh was firmly in control. The splinter publications did not interfere with *The National Reformer's* circulation. Nor did the dissident activities stop the growth of the National Secular Society. He had managed to keep the most respected adversary in careful leash. Despite his differences Holyoake had finally consented to be one of the eight vice-presidents of the NSS, and his own paper carried routine announcements of the Society as well as, periodically, the complete roster of the Council and the formal set of rules. Bradlaugh's handling of his rivals often had a touch of Machiavelli.

The appearance of Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant in court defending the dissemination of birth-control information shook the Secular Society more deeply, and swiftly united their adversaries. Holyoake's paper joined with Foote's to make *The Secular Review and Secularist* in the spring of 1877. The maligned Charles Watts, still smarting from his snub by Bradlaugh, joined them. Since it was obvious even to the blind that Holyoake and Foote would not be compatible, Watts purchased Holyoake's share, and Holyoake retired from Secularist editing for a full five years. The dissidents judged themselves well enough supported to found a new organization, the British Secular Union, and for a few years, beginning with 1878, issued a *British Secular Almanack*, in imitation of the successful annual of the NSS.

The new organization issued a statement signed by thirty-seven members. Structurally the Union was a close copy of the NSS—four shillings per year dues, an annual Conference, and a Central Council to conduct business. It included in its "Principles" the statement which Bradlaugh could never condone:

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Secularism intrinsically does not contend against the Existence of a Deity, but against dishonouring conceptions thereof; not against the Inspiration of Scripture, but against the binding force of what is inapplicable to human welfare; not against a Future Existence, but against that idea of it which excludes the hope of improvement and honestly-earned happiness.³³

The new organization convened at Nottingham on "Whit-Sunday" 1877. (The use of the ecclesiastical calendar must have made Bradlaugh wince.) It was chaired by Holyoake, and adopted a characteristically pious tone:

Whatever work the previously existing Organization might, under a fresh impulse and wider policy, succeed in doing, it was felt by a large number of Secularists throughout the country that the work they desired to see achieved would have to be accomplished, if at all, by other agencies.³⁴

The next annual conference was at Easter "attended by quite a surprising number of representative Secularists from all parts of the country". They continued to be vague about their numbers. Their headquarters, *pro tem.*, were at South Place Institute, Finsbury, where Moncure Conway was hospitable to all varieties of unorthodox gatherings.

The NSS was equally vague about membership, but we do know that by the late eighties it was governed by a Council of over 100, twenty-five of whom were from London. Forty lecturers were listed at one time for London alone. There were twenty-two branches of the Society in metropolitan England that could at least furnish a secretary's name and address, a branch in nearly every centre of population. No rival Free-thought organization could approach this scope.

In all of these heretical movements there appears to be no substitute for strong leadership. Those who set up the new Union may have hurt the National Secular Society, but they had no Bradlaugh of their own. The split remained through Bradlaugh's lifetime and beyond, but the dissidents kept shifting positions from crisis to crisis, whereas Bradlaugh continued to be predictable.

Foote seems particularly opportunist and difficult to follow.

He stayed with the new publishing venture only until March 1878, when he left *The Secular Review* to Watts with the intention of founding his own periodical, *The Liberal*, but I can find no evidence that it ever appeared. He later became active once again in the NSS, became the editor of *The Freethinker*, and the centre of a storm in the blasphemy trials.

The faithful Charles Watts continued until September 1884, but was, according to McCabe so pursued with lawsuits that he accepted the invitation to a Freethought "pastorate" in Canada.³⁵ He left the printing business with his son, Charles Albert Watts, and the editorship of *The Secular Review* to W. Stewart Ross, who wrote under the pen-name of "Saladin".

After *The Fruits of Philosophy*, relations between Holyoake and Bradlaugh were never really cordial again, though Josiah Grimson arranged a surface reconciliation at Leicester and thereafter they allowed themselves to meet in public and refrained from outright insult. But Bradlaugh's daughter, Hypatia, when she later became his biographer, remained so bitter towards the surviving Holyoake that one is tempted to speculate whether Holyoake was as mellow as he appeared in his old-age reminiscences. In the hiatus when he was not editing a Secularist journal—that is before 1882—he presumably published, among other things, a tract under the pen-name of ION entitled *Blasts from Bradlaugh's Own Trumpet* (London, c. 1882), subtitled "Ballads, Extracts, Cartoons / Versified, Selected, and Sketched by 'ION' / with 13 Illustrations." Holyoake was, apparently, something of a cartoonist, though, as was the case with the endpapers of this volume, he was not above asking for assistance in this department. The pamphlet is full of rancour and effrontery, and if it is completely Holyoake's (as I am assuming) there may be good reason why Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner never forgave him. The parodies, quotations, and pictures all make these inferences:

Bradlaugh is power-mad and irresponsible.

He is dishonest in handling funds.

His relations with Annie Besant are questionable.

ION's methods include quoting from *The National Reformer*, out of context and from as far back as 1868; pointed quotations

from the Bible or Shakespeare; and a set of cartoon-symbols that are peculiarly complex, as the reproduced sample indicates. Here sits, as on a throne, the Republican who would himself be King. The crown is being melted down in his own private melting pot. The symbol of Roman power he holds ends in an axe-blade labelled "for the disloyal". On the throne is marked the motto: "No king, no God, no families". Beside him, also wearing the liberty cap is, obviously, Mrs. Besant, though the "Revised Decalogue" she holds hides most of her face. The "revision" consists of deleting the First and Fourth Commandments—the First since they are Atheists; the Fourth ("honour thy father and thy mother") since Annie has left her family, and her daughter has been taken from her by law. Apparently Bradlaugh once said that a government should rest on the basis of a happy and contented people. *This* arrangement rests on the backs of dupes. The title, "The Seated Member and the Sat Upon", has reference in addition to Bradlaugh's long struggle to be seated as a Member of Parliament.

One of the less virulent selections is this "Revised Version of the National Anthem (for use in the Bradlaugh Republic)." (Bradlaugh had written a Secularist pamphlet called "God = X.")

"X" save our graceless Chief
Reward his unbelief,
"X" save our B.
O'er Church victorious
And Throne, once glorious,
Now sole Lord over us—
Xtol our B!

SCIENCE, our "X"! ARISE!
Xplode B's enemies,
And squash them small!
Confound their politics!
Frustrate their knavish tricks,
Ah "X"! these heretics
Xtinguish all!

The Non-Christians

Thy Xcellent gifts in store
Great "X"! be pleased to pour
On sacred B!
May he repeal the laws
Which made our Conscience pause,
(Oaths merely move our jaws)
And win loud lip-applause,
"X"! [pelled] M.P.!

The last five lines of this, too, need to be read in context with the long parliamentary fight to which we shall next give our attention.

The eighties saw two of the most exciting Secularist dramas enacted simultaneously: Bradlaugh's effort to sit in Parliament, and the action against the editors of *The Freethinker* for blasphemy. Bradlaugh was involved in the latter, too, but only as a minor character. It will perhaps be better to deal first with his more crucial struggle which was, indeed, the climax to his career.

He had for a long time felt that what he stood for would be justified and, somehow, dignified, if he, Charles Bradlaugh, of lowly birth, with almost no formal education, maligned champion of unpopular causes, could sit in Parliament. His attempts went back to 1868. Finally, after twelve years, he won a narrow victory in the constituency of Northampton. Labouchère much more handily won Northampton's other seat. In May 1880 Bradlaugh asked to be allowed to make an affirmation of allegiance, rather than be sworn in by a religious oath. Affirmation had been allowed previously for Jews and Quakers, but the case of an avowed Atheist had never before come up, so the House appointed a Committee of seventeen to consider the request. The Committee was evenly divided and needed the vote of the chairman to make the decision, refusing the request.

Thereupon Bradlaugh, feeling he had done his best to avoid the empty pretext of a hypocritical ceremony, agreed to go through with the oath. But if it was improper to allow an Atheist to affirm, how could it be more proper for him to swear? Gladstone again referred the question to a Select Committee of twenty-three. These gentlemen duly examined the great heretic,

and reported that an unbeliever could not swear in the name of God in the House of Commons. Secularists were united in supporting Bradlaugh's right to a seat, but they were not all agreed on the ethics of his position. Foote disliked the idea, but took a pragmatist's view; Holyoake was grieved that Bradlaugh should even consider taking the oath; and "Saladin" treated Bradlaugh sharply, as was his custom. But the Almanack (of the NSS) allowed itself the levity of a "King James Version":

Now it came to pass, in the days after Benjamin [Disraeli] was driven forth into the wilderness, that the legislators came down into the House to be sworn. . . .

But the humorist was unaware, at the end of 1880, of the number of chapters still to come.

Gladstone, certainly out of sympathy with Bradlaugh's Atheism, nonetheless wanted to make as little as possible of the affair and get on with the business of the House. He managed to push through a Standing Order allowing a member-elect the choice of affirmation at his own legal peril. This done, Bradlaugh made his affirmation and took his seat. As soon, however, as he had cast his first routine vote, he was issued a writ of penalty for £300 for having voted without taking the oath. In actual fact he had been in the House for ninety-one days in the 1880 session, voting regularly. But his enemies were adamant, and the seat was declared vacant.

There is no point in reciting the almost incredible machinations and legalistic shadow-boxing that continued day by day for the next five years. Each round of argument ended in declaring the seat vacant. Each time Bradlaugh returned to his constituency in Northampton to get himself elected once again. His victories at the polls were never overwhelming—less than a 200 majority out of about 7,000 votes cast; but the margin in his favour continued to climb. Each time when he presented himself and was rebuffed he used the opportunity to give a speech at the Bar. The margin against him in the House remained at about thirty votes. The main action was crossed and criss-crossed with counter-actions, some initiated by Bradlaugh, some by his bitterest opponents—Lord Randolph Churchill, Sir Stafford Northcote, Mr. Newdegate, and Sir Henry Tyler.

On 3 August 1881 when Bradlaugh tried to enter the House he was seized by officials. Bradlaugh was no weakling nor did he react kindly to violence. His ejection required four messengers and ten policemen and opened up a completely new area for litigation. T. P. O'Connor, later editor of *The Star* and a personal weekly, *Mainly About People* (*M.A.P.*), was probably the most literate of the observers on the fateful day:

It was the scene on the day [Bradlaugh] tried to force his way into the House. I saw him but a few moments before the attempt was made. He was dressed as usual, all in black—like more than one freethinker, it was almost an affectation of his that he should always appear in the dress characteristic of the Catholic priest or a Nonconformist minister; he also wore a very shiny and new silk hat—he wore, too, the large black tie, half French, half clerical, which he always affected, and this was tied across an expansive white shirt-front. He was talking to a group which surrounded him, and, though one might detect a certain air of excitement, the dominant expression was smiling, debonair, the look of a bridegroom rather than of a man facing a big struggle. It seemed but a few seconds after this when I beheld the same face, haggard, fierce, terrible—almost the death-mask of one who had just been guillotined, so deadly was the pallor, so fierce the look at once of anger, pain, defiance. And Bradlaugh, the great giant of a man, the representative of a constituency, was being dragged, with torn coat and shirt, down the steps by a band of attendants and policemen, resisting, shouting, defiant, apparently astounded as much as others at the sudden transformation which had changed him from the erect and smiling and respectable figure into this hunted and outraged outcast.³⁶

In February 1882, Bradlaugh advanced to the table in the House, drew a Bible from his pocket, and administered the oath to himself and took his seat. The House adjourned. He was again rebuffed. Not all the action was in the House. Some of it moved to the courts, appeal following appeal. Ironically Bradlaugh had to wait the advent of a Tory government under the Marquis of Salisbury in 1886 for the conclusion of his fight. On 13 January, the new Speaker, Mr. Peel, obviously determined to end this

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disruption of orderly government, refused to recognize any opposition, and permitted Bradlaugh to take the oath. After five years, nine months and eleven days, and after being elected five times, an Atheist sat legally in the House of Commons.

Though this battle, too, was won, his prodigious strength had been overtaxed, and the old vigour did not last much longer. By the time he took his seat he was heavily in debt. His opponents knew he had no private resources and made the battle as costly as possible. When he and Mrs. Besant had founded the Free-thought Publishing Company they had borrowed money and some of it was still owed. Poor men in the Secular movement gave up tobacco and beer to send money to their hero when appeals were made in *The National Reformer*. In 1888 he actually contemplated leaving Parliament to earn money, but W. T. Stead once more came to the rescue with a fund-raising drive in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and managed to clear the debts.

Bradlaugh's losses were not only financial. In 1885, under the strong personal influence of Bernard Shaw, Annie Besant joined the Fabian Society and thereafter gave more and more of her energies to Socialism—a philosophy which Bradlaugh considered a danger to the moral fibre of the nation. More puzzling and more painful still—to both Shaw and Bradlaugh—was her sudden conversion to Theosophy by Mme. Helena Blavatsky in 1889, after Shaw had innocently given her a copy of Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* to review for Stead's paper. Shaw himself thought the tome practically unreadable. He confessed to being utterly confounded at the result and rushed round to the Secular Society's Shop to ask if she was quite mad. "It was no use," Shaw wrote later. "She actually joked about it: a thing I never heard her do before. She said she supposed that since she had, as a Theosophist, become a vegetarian, her mind may have been affected."³⁷ Her erstwhile comrade-in-arms could not take it so lightly. Though Annie persistently maintained that there was no inconsistency in being a Secularist, a Socialist, and a Theosophist simultaneously, and though she faithfully remained an editor of *The National Reformer* until Bradlaugh's death, the partnership had in effect dissolved, and Bradlaugh realized it.

The phenomena connected with Mme. Blavatsky's brief appearance in London deserve further comment in their proper

place, and Mrs. Besant's career will be picked up there too. But the full span of her life goes beyond the scope and geography of this book. Happily she has received full attention recently in the two-volume biography of Arthur Nethercot: *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant*, and *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant* (Chicago, 1960, 1963).

Bradlaugh's only son had died young. Now, in 1888, Alice, the daughter who had been his home companion, also died. Only Hypatia remained.

The few years left to him when he entered Parliament were not wasted. Again and again during the long struggle, the Government—and Labouchère—had made unsuccessful attempts to substitute affirmation for oath and thus resolve the conflict. In 1888 Bradlaugh's own Affirmation Bill passed both Houses and became law. He was active against British misrule in Ireland and India. His advocacy of Indian rights caused his colleagues to dub him "the member for India". Apart from these measures, one must not be too surprised to find him voting, as a determined individualist, with the Tories, as for example in opposition to the eight-hour day.

Outside Parliament, he remained President of the Land Law Reform League. He was instrumental in setting up the League for Defence of Constitutional Rights—a direct result of the parliamentary storm. And he helped in the formation of the National Association for Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, an outgrowth of the action against *The Freethinker*. It is, parenthetically, a comment on the nature of the reform movements of the day that of the thirty-three names that appear prominently on the Boards, vice-presidencies, etc. of these three organizations, ten names appear twice, one (Stewart Headlam's) on all three.³⁸

Ill and discouraged, Bradlaugh set out for India in 1889 to attend the Fifth Indian National Congress, which was as yet a body without real power. He returned in 1890 and announced his intention of resigning as president of the NSS. His illness was probably Bright's Disease and it was progressing. His travels—to India, to the Continent, to America—were never for pleasure. He did scarcely anything for pleasure and hardly knew what it was. Hypatia said she could not remember his ever having taken a holiday of as much as a full week until 1885. His

life as a lawyer would have sufficed for most men, without politics, editing, debating, pamphleteering, or organizing. A centenary publication lists a hundred pamphlets of his authorship and eleven books. (Not that he ever took time to write a book: they are all collections of articles, court cases, etc.) There are fifty magazine articles recorded, and at least forty debates.

Overwork certainly contributed to his death at fifty-seven, on 30 January 1891. Nearly all the religious rebels with whom we will deal thought of themselves as appealing to "the masses". Few of them attracted more than a smattering of the more intellectual workers. At Bradlaugh's funeral poor men came by the thousands. They took the spades from the gravediggers for the honour of filling his grave.

Atheism was never for him a cold, barren negative. It was a hearty assertion of his belief in humanity. Christianity was, for him, supine. Jesus substituted "I believe" for "I think", and put "watch and pray" ahead of "think and act". Inevitably legends grew up about such a man. One was the "watch story" attributed to other Freethinkers as well. He was supposed to have taken out his watch on the public platform and given the Almighty, if he existed, five minutes to strike him dead. Hypatia Bonner found the story absurd, and completely out of character for her father. Bernard Shaw, on the other hand, thought the story fitted Bradlaugh perfectly. "If Bradlaugh did not do it, he ought to have done it," Shaw wrote in the last year of his life, "as it is the short and entirely proper and practical way of determining, not whether God exists or not, but whether, if He does, He is a savagely violent and vindictive tribal idol like Blake's *Nobodaddy*."³⁹ Indeed Shaw was so fond of the idea that he tried to repeat the experiment himself at a party but was forbidden by a cautious host. The other inevitable story was that he recanted his Atheism on his deathbed. There is, of course, no evidence whatever of this. Bradlaugh knew that evangelists loved this kind of yarn, and was at some pains to contravene it. On his 1875 American trip he had been ill and hospitalized in St. Luke's, New York, and had been under anaesthesia. Moncure Conway, then in New York, visited him, and Bradlaugh insisted that Conway interview the doctors and nurses so that he could be witness against any inventions that might later be reported.⁴⁰

Even so we find Hypatia entering into an altercation with a Rev. Allen Rees, who, in a sermon, had claimed that Bradlaugh "weakened in his atheism" and had felt envy for "his Christian brother". Rees, it turns out, was "misinformed", but Mrs. Bonner, as defender of her father's honour, is not in the least gracious.⁴¹

There was one element of deathbed melodrama. While he lay dying on 27 January, the House of Commons passed a resolution expunging from its Journals the bitter entries of former years. But Bradlaugh, in a coma, never learned of the belated gesture. Gladstone asked afterwards, "Does anybody who hears me believe that that controversy, so prosecuted and so abandoned, was beneficial to the Christian religion?"

During the great controversy he could doubtlessly have marshalled enough support to gain his seat if he had been content to play down his Secularist opinions in the committee interrogations. "Good God, Bradlaugh," one of the members is reported to have said, "what does it matter whether there's a God or not?" It mattered a great deal to Charles Bradlaugh.

At his death his debts still totalled £6,000. The creditors, many of them his supporters, agreed to settle for half; but Mrs. Bonner insisted on full payment since many of the creditors were poor people who had invested in debenture bonds. She put the 7,000-volume library up for sale, and started a fund to which Freethinkers could contribute. The novelist, Edna Lyall, began a second one for Christians.⁴²

Encomiums were many and flowery, but they only temporarily covered the breach in Secularism. In spite of Bradlaugh's protestations it is hard to think of him as a man without a religion. As Moncure Conway stated it,

When men renounce lucrative pursuits, go about in the world facing mobs, incurring prisons, endangering their lives, like George Fox, the Quaker, and Paine and Bradlaugh, it is not for a philosophy or a theory; it is for a religion.⁴³

In the same decade in which Parliament engaged the energies of Bradlaugh, G. W. Foote projected himself into the martyrdom and self-advertisement that eventually made him Bradlaugh's

official successor. He was of the "new generation" of Secularists. He did not revolt from a strict Calvinist home, but had considerable religious freedom as a youth, and moved on his own volition from Wesleyanism to Church of England to Unitarianism by the time he was fifteen. At eighteen he left his home in Plymouth for London where he worked in a library and studied in a Hall of Science. In 1870, when he was only twenty, he was already contributing to *The National Reformer*. Shortly afterwards he became a Secularist lecturer. His brief marriage in 1877 ended with the death of his bride seven months later. Mrs. Law credited him with a good voice, but admitted he had not "a popular style", as a lecturer. He was better with his pen.⁴⁴ We have noted him as something of an opportunist. His bid for power in the NSS was premature. His withdrawal was not permanent.

Quin remembered him in the seventies as standing for a more "constructive" brand of Secularism than Bradlaugh's, and felt that he had brought to the movement a highly literate background and a deliberative mind, but found him materially changed in the early eighties.⁴⁵ He was occasionally given to uncontrolled invective.

Bradlaugh and Besant were instrumental in turning over to Foote and William James Ramsey the publication of *The Free-thinker* in May 1881. It was a penny weekly and therefore needed (Foote explained) a lively style for "the people". He devoted it to the relentless war against superstition in general and the Christian superstition in particular. In the first issue he made it clear that he would use the weapons of sarcasm and ridicule, and instituted a column candidly labelled "Profane Jokes".

(In order to reach a more intellectual audience, Foote found it necessary in 1883 to found a second magazine, *Progress*, a monthly. It is in this, after his release from jail, that Foote tells his own story in eighteen instalments from July 1884 to December 1885.)

Beginning with the third number of *The Freethinker*, Foote introduced woodcuts by an unnamed artist, the first of the "Comic Bible Sketches". He and Ramsey also announced that they would reprint some of the raciest plates from the French

La Bible Amusante. Reaction was immediate, not all of it favourable. Circulation rose. In January of 1882 Joseph Mazzini Wheeler became sub-editor, and Edward Aveling joined the staff. Their enemies, Foote declared, were not only the Christians, but also those "mealy mouthed Freethinkers who want omelets without breaking eggs"—an obvious reference to Holyoake who deplored *The Freethinker's* level of taste.

Foote was obviously fishing in troubled waters. He had not long to wait for a strike. A fundamentalist butcher, Henry Varley, who had previously attacked Bradlaugh, now issued a circular "To the Members of Parliament", citing the obvious blasphemy of Foote's paper. The circular was brought to the attention of the Home Secretary, Sir William Harcourt, who was of the sensible opinion that more harm than good would come of prosecution. Foote himself then wrote a most taunting letter to Harcourt. But the Home Secretary remained calm.

In the meantime another Secularist, Henry Seymour, Secretary of a Branch of the NSS, was charged with blasphemy for a profane sentence that appeared on a poster at Tunbridge Wells. Under advice not named (but it may well have been Bradlaugh's) Seymour pleaded guilty and was later discharged. Foote thought this a mistake, as it whetted the appetites of their opponents for a "full repast". However it is possible that the real target of all the blasphemy trials was not Foote but Bradlaugh, whose reputation could be harmed by association at a time when he was under fire before Parliament.

Foote's turn came in July when he and Ramsey and their printer, E. W. Whittle, were summoned by the Lord Mayor to the Mansion House to answer the charge of blasphemy. Ramsey and Whittle had an attorney (Mr. Lickford). Foote, in the tradition of his better-known predecessors, pleaded his own case. Though nominally prosecuted by the Crown, it was Sir Henry Tyler, a Member of Parliament, former chairman of a Light Company, who provided the funds, giving further substance to the suspicion that Bradlaugh was the quarry.

The specific charges were contained in *The Freethinker* drawings of 29 January, 23 April, 28 May, and 11 June 1882. It is worth examining these "shocking" Bible illustrations. There can scarcely be any argument about their vulgarity. The imagi-

nation and humour are crude. All the Biblical faces are Semitic stereotypes. Naturally the more sensitive and cultured members of the Secularist movement were repelled, some, like Holyoake, so much so that they could not support Foote, even on principle. This is unfortunate, since some of the subjects might, treated with real wit, have made good satire.

For the Christmas issue of 1881 we have Elisha standing smugly by while the bears eat up the children. (2 Kings ii, 23, 24.)

The sketches mentioned in the first indictment were:

Adam and Eve being kicked out of the garden—a big foot visible, and a sign on the gate: TO LET/EDEN/Apply to/Jehovah & Co.

“A Carnivorous God”—Cain offering vegetables and a can of sauerkraut, Abel offering some quacking ducks; a two-headed God in the clouds, frowning at Cain, smiling at Abel. (Genesis iv, 3-15.)

“Divine Illumination”—The text: “And God said, Let there be light, and there was light.” In the clouds an old man, again obviously Jewish, strikes a flint (or match?) for his pipe.

“A Miss and a Hit”—An angel deflecting the shotgun in Abraham’s hands, so that instead of shooting the blindfolded Esau, he shoots instead the caricature of God. (Genesis xxii, 11, 12.)

“The Raising of Lazarus”—reproduced, between pages 78-79.

Also illustrated is the first of the sketches when they were resumed in March 1884.

In addition to such visual delicacies, *The Freethinker* presented “Atheistic Sermons” preached from Bible texts. While not everything in the magazine was in the execrable taste of the cartoons, it is disturbing to realize that Foote thought he was addressing the common man, and it is understandable that the real working men, who were attracted to Bradlaugh, did not rally around Foote.

The editors were not indicted for bad taste, however, but for “being wicked and evil-disposed persons . . . wickedly and profanely devising and intending to asperse and vilify Almighty God, and to bring the Holy Scriptures and Christian Religion into disbelief and contempt.” The indictment, covering sixteen counts and contained in twenty-eight folios, proved to be

unwieldy to the prosecution. Its scope was too broad, and it tried to condemn the entire Freethought movement, specifically including Bradlaugh in the charges. This would be a long procedure, and while the indictment was pending the offensive magazine continued to appear. The publicity it was receiving helped circulation considerably. Beginning with the issue of 16 July 1882, the paper appeared with a large banner headline: PROSECUTED FOR BLASPHEMY, which it continued to run throughout the trials. During the preliminary hearings Whittle bowed out as printer, so for 23 July the issue consisted of a single sheet, folded and distributed only to the British Museum. On the 30th it was back in circulation, looking quite as usual with a little note of apology explaining that *The Freethinker*, "like the founder of Christianity, disappeared late one week and reappeared early the next".

To get faster action against the blasphemers, therefore, a second indictment was initiated, based solely on the Christmas issue of *The Freethinker* (which Foote confessed he had made particularly "hot") and aimed only at the staff of the magazine—Foote, Ramsey (proprietor) and Henry Arthur Kemp (printer and publisher).

The first trial took place on 1 March 1883 at the Old Bailey under Justice North. In anticipation of seizure, Foote had the entire printing plant moved to the basement of a private home. *The Freethinker* was never seized and it did not cease publication. The prosecuting attorney, Sir Hardinge Giffard, was a clever lawyer and an effective performer. He charged that some of the pictures were too bad to describe, and thus left the public to imagine the worst. Foote, who could hardly maintain that he was *not* trying to undermine the Christian religion, took the position that opinions just like *The Freethinker's* were common enough in more sophisticated and higher-priced magazines, and could therefore hardly be classed as blasphemy. Justice North tried to block this line of defence. Other papers, he pointed out, were not at the moment on trial. If they were also guilty, that was not a present concern of the court. Nevertheless Foote persisted and succeeded in reading into the record "blasphemous" material from other magazines, including some fatuous material from the Salvation Army's *War Cry*. His address to the

jury lasted two and a half hours. Foote put on the show. Ramsey summed up the argument. The jury, after a little more than two hours' deliberation, announced that they could not agree. North dismissed them and set a new trial for the following Monday with a new jury. The defendants, who had up to this time been allowed out on bail, were now retained in jail. The Justice betrayed no sign of leniency toward blasphemers.

Foote complained that three days in prison were not adequate preparation for a new trial. Bradlaugh obtained permission to visit and advise him. It may have been his idea for Foote to be represented this time by counsel, a Mr. Cluer. It had been evident enough that the personalities of the Justice and the principal defendant were not congenial. But there was really little more that could be said. The new trial lasted six hours, and the jury reached its verdict without leaving the box. As long as the blasphemy laws were on the books, and provided someone would go to the trouble and expense of prosecuting, it is hard to see how Foote and his colleagues could be anything but guilty. The stringency of the sentences was a surprise, however, even to some of the jurors: twelve months for Foote, nine for Ramsey, three for Kemp. "Thank you, my Lord," said Foote. "The sentence is worthy of your creed."

On the 11 March 1883 *Freethinker*, there appeared under the title and the line "Edited by G. W. Foote": *Sentenced to Twelve Months' Imprisonment for Blasphemous Libel*. And the following week the additional by-line "Interim Editor, Edward B. Aveling, D.Sc., Fellow of University College, London". With Aveling at the helm publication continued regularly, but while Foote remained in jail the offensive cartoons were dropped.

In the meantime the more complex indictment had been completed. Bradlaugh, who really had nothing to do with the publication of *The Freethinker*, demanded and secured the right to be tried separately. These trials would not be in the Old Bailey, but in the Court of Queen's Bench before the Lord Chief Justice of England. Bradlaugh advised Foote to plead inability to defend himself while in prison, and predicted that if he did so the case would never be heard of again. But Foote, martyr to the last, insisted on his right of trial. He was temporarily released from jail to appear at Bradlaugh's trial, which lasted three days

beginning 10 April and ended in acquittal. The Foote-Ramsey trial lasted two days. The atmosphere was quite different from that of the Old Bailey. Lord Coleridge, Foote recorded, showed every possible courtesy and fairness. The jury once again could not reach a verdict, and plans were being made for Foote to have special treatment while he was preparing for a retrial. But at this point the prosecution, under heavy pressure from the public, decided the time had come to abandon the case.

Two months later a crowded meeting at St. James's Hall demanded a reduction of the sentences. The petitions were carefully worded so as not to suggest approval of Foote's editorship, but rather to attack the blasphemy laws themselves as barbarous, and Justice North's handling of the case as personally spiteful. Signatures were obtained from such notables as Herbert Spencer, T. H. Huxley, and Frederic Harrison, in addition to the usual array of Freethought supporters. The name of the Secularist elder with whom Foote had sided after *The Fruits of Philosophy* scandal was glaringly absent.

Sir William Harcourt at the Home Office had not entered the blasphemy argument without considerable provocation. Once committed, he was not to be moved. Foote and Ramsey served their full time.

On his release in March 1884 Foote resumed editorship of his paper, and named J. M. Wheeler sub-editor. Aveling got what appeared to be a rather cool note of thanks, but stayed on the staff. On 16 March the Comic Bible Sketches began again with "A Father's Love" (see between pages 78-79). They were as obnoxious as ever, and got larger, sometimes blown up to a full page. But there were no more prosecutions. The blasphemy issue was dead.

To show how dead, one may look at the more abandoned tone of some of the other Secularist provocations following Foote's release. Here is a sample of "Saladin's" casual comment from *The Secular Review* the next year:

The new Bishop of London . . . has been *confirming*. We were a grim Calvinist, and were never confirmed; and we do not know what the fury it means. We gather that it is somehow connected with an "outpouring of the Holy Ghost", from

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which we infer that the Holy Ghost is now in liquid form. One step further he may be rarefied into gas, and then disappear altogether. It is distressing to know that the Ghost has got so thin. He couldn't be poured out in the grand old times when he visited the Virgin Mary. Joseph's rival was solid enough, and did not then at all resemble a jug of stout or a pint of paraffin oil. . . .⁴⁶

The blasphemy trials separated old friends, but also uncovered unexpected sources of support. The radical churchman, the Rev. Stewart Headlam, protested Foote's imprisonment vigorously, and condemned the more subtle blasphemy that existed within the Church:

From the bottom of our hearts we condemn the blasphemy of those clergymen and religious teachers, who have darkened and blotted the character of God, and have represented him to the people as a cruel, partial tyrant, jealous of their joy, and preparing for them an eternity of torment.

He condemned also the blasphemy of *The Freethinker*

not because it uses ridicule, but because it shows an ignorance of the true character of Christian revelation.

Why should Foote and Ramsey be locked up while the Salvation Army, the Calvinistic clergy, the Plutocratic Bishops, and the Pious Merchants go free? Furthermore the 13,000 clergymen who signed the petition against the Affirmation Bill are themselves Atheists! They have no faith in God "if they dare not meet Mr. Bradlaugh unfettered".⁴⁷ These were strong words for the clergy of the eighties, and only a most unusual Anglican priest would have been capable of them.

In 1890, realizing that his own usefulness, if not his life, was nearing its end, Charles Bradlaugh endorsed G. W. Foote as his successor in the National Secular Society. He must have done so with trepidation and with a heavy heart. He still had, for a few moments, a voice powerful enough to name his own successor. And who else could it be? The one obviously trained and qualified person, Annie Besant, was no longer a candidate. She could have dominated any organization she chose, and it was clear that she was preparing to wrap herself in the mantle of Helena

Blavatsky, whose death was to occur just four months after Bradlaugh's. The only other female possibility would have been Mrs. Harriet T. Law, who had a longer history in the Secular movement than Annie, and whose editing of *The Secular Chronicle* (Birmingham) since 1875 was superior to much of the journalism in the Society. She continued to travel and lecture in all the big towns, as Bradlaugh himself was wont to do in earlier times, sometimes speaking three times on three different subjects on a single Sunday. But on the platform she was known to be bluff and even raucous and had never achieved a large independent following.

The younger Watts was too "literary" and was, besides, firmly in the Holyoake camp; and Holyoake himself, especially after his refusal to support the defendants of the blasphemy trials, was unthinkable. (Bradlaugh could not know that his own engagement at the Hall of Science the Sunday following his death would be filled by Holyoake.) John MacKinnon Robertson, the self-educated Scot whom Annie Besant had brought down from Edinburgh to help edit *The National Reformer* while Bradlaugh was in Parliament, had not yet had time to prove himself. Young Dr. Aveling, Foote's interim editor, was by common consent one of the most talented and literate of the new Secularists, but he was also unstable politically and a libertine personally. He was as repulsive to many men as he was unaccountably appealing to a series of women. Bradlaugh was not the first "strong leader" to find suddenly with dismay that he had no successor.

Foote had been as equivocal on the subject of Bradlaugh's leadership as he had been on most issues. He had been one of the 1877 secessionists and supporters of the British Secular Union, but he had given Bradlaugh unstinted editorial support in his early battles with Parliament, and had gradually drifted back into the fold. In 1887 Foote was still critical—Bradlaugh was devoting too much of his time to Parliament, and Besant too much to Socialism.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Foote had made himself the centre of Secular attention in the blasphemy trials. In fact, while Foote was in prison—which was also the period of some of the most sensational episodes of the Parliamentary struggle—the NSS was enjoying its peak of popularity. Following his release

from prison, he was in high demand as a speaker. His activity in the League for Defence of Constitutional Rights must have pleased Bradlaugh, as much as his cavalier enjoyment of the martyr's role made him uneasy. ("I feel such . . . righteousness in attacking [Hypocrisy]," Foote once wrote to Quin.)

Thus with Bradlaugh's hesitant blessing Foote was acclaimed President of the National Secular Society in 1891 and held the position until his death in 1915. His magazine, *The Freethinker*, and Watts's later *Literary Guide* were the sole journalistic survivors of the war years. But the National Secular Society had already begun to decline before Bradlaugh's death, and a new administration did not halt the trend.

There was a brief display of unification with Watts and Holyoake back in the old organization, but unity was largely a matter of record only. Internal tensions that were submerged during Bradlaugh's life soon surfaced. Even before he died (1888) MacKay's scurrilous biography appeared. It was immediately suppressed under threat of libel suits, and the unsold copies were confiscated. But Nelson tells the story that for years Watts kept a copy in his desk drawer to nurse his own grudge.⁴⁹ As the NSS became less representative of Secularism in England, Holyoake and Charles A. Watts gathered a group of seasoned Secularists to preserve the literature of the movement and continue its distribution. Young Watts was not a colourful figure, not a public figure at all, but Walter David Nelson gives him much credit for preserving the movement. Times had changed and the era of the rough-and-tumble platform exchanges was at an end. If England were going to be secularized, it would have to be by a flood of cheap literature for sale in railway stations and public bookstalls "so that the literate masses might learn the damaging scientific findings against Biblical stories and Church doctrine".⁵⁰ Watts had been publishing *The Agnostic Annual* since 1883 (changed later to the *Rationalist Annual*), and launched other periodicals in 1885. From 1899 on, these publishing activities were centred in the Rationalist Press Association, an organization which continued to promote Secularism into the new century. Their headquarters in Johnson's Court came to be called "The Blasphemy Depot".

The formation of the RPA signalled a change in Rationalist

attitudes. The new Agnostics condescended to the old Secularists. They recoiled from the old vulgarity, the poorly paid and pompous speakers, the ill-bred audiences. The very name "Agnostic" was a literary invention of T. H. Huxley. Old-line Secularists felt it was an equivocation—that an Agnostic was simply an Atheist without the courage of his convictions. But in responding to the *Agnostic Annual* in 1901, one reviewer found the articles well written and comprehensive but too ponderous and scholarly for most readers. "Earlier Agnosticism promised to fascinate multitudes, but now it appeals only to a tiny coterie."⁵¹

With the privilege of hindsight, we might now venture that Robertson might have been a sounder choice for the leadership of the NSS than Foote. He and Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner tried to keep *The National Reformer* going, but *The Freethinker* was now considered the official organ of the Society, and the *Reformer* was forced to discontinue in 1893. Robertson then founded his own *Free Review* which survived only another two years. Though of a very different temperament than Bradlaugh, his career was more properly an extension of Bradlaugh's than that of any other of the later Secularists. He ran for Bradlaugh's vacated seat in Parliament in 1895 and lost; but he succeeded in 1906. As a pro-Boer he went to South Africa for the *Morning Leader* and wrote *Wrecking the Empire* (1901). Till the end of his life in 1933 he was concerned with politics, Freethought, lecturing and writing.

What remained of an alliance within the movement fell apart in 1894. An eminent Nonconformist preacher, the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes, had told the story of an atheist shoemaker who had been converted on his deathbed. This was too much of a cliché for Foote, who called the Reverend a liar. Holyoake had always made it a point to remain on good terms with the liberal clergy, and the two preachers for whom he had the most respect were Joseph Parker and Hugh Price Hughes. Holyoake therefore, motivated either by regard for Hughes or by his old antipathy for Foote, or both, set out to find the surviving witnesses to the shoemaker's story. He found they supported the minister. No one expected that Foote would retract the charge gracefully, and he did not.

By 1901 even the optimistic *Almanack* of the NSS had to

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confess that the year had not gone well and that "a measure of reaction has taken place" for all advanced movements. In 1903, the usual "Summary of the Year's Progress" is simply not given. Only eight London branches were still listed from the twenty-two of 1886.

There was some attempt made to replace Foote as President, but I have not found the full facts recorded. Bernard Shaw recalls with some relish that "When Bradlaugh died, the National Secular Society, having some temporary disagreement with his successor, Mr. Foote, wanted another leader," but he is not specific about the time. He assumed they were looking him over for the position when they asked him to speak. He chose for his subject, "Progress in Free Thought".

I had an exceedingly pleasant evening. I do not think it would have been possible for Bradlaugh to have thrown the most bigoted audience of Plymouth Brethren into such transports of rage as I did the freethinkers at the Hall of Science. . . . I warned them that if any of them fell into the hands of a moderately intelligent Jesuit—not that I ever met one—he could turn them inside out.

He then went on to explain that such concepts as the Trinity and the Immaculate Conception could be interpreted in commonsense terms.

You are the father of your son and the son of your father. . . .
I believe in the Immaculate Conception of Jesus's mother, and
I believe in the Immaculate Conception of your mother.⁵²

Shaw was not the man they were looking for. The man they were looking for never came.

The first of the self-styled Secularists spent his last years in Brighton. "Eastern Lodge" was Holyoake's home from 1886. He spent his time writing memoirs and attending conferences concerned with his favourite causes, where he was generally accorded the adulation reserved for elderly pioneers. He attended Congresses of the Co-operative Movement in France (1885) and Italy (1886), and till the end of his life he attended the monthly meetings in London. Working closely with Watts, he became president of the Rationalist Press Association in 1890

and kept the office till his death. He supported Henry Salt's Humanitarian League in opposing vivisection and blood sports. In the nineties he chaired a "Liberty of Bequests Committee" in an unsuccessful effort to gain for Freethinking bodies the right to leave property to heirs. He gave some of his last energies to the peace crusades of W. T. Stead. He kept a wide circle of correspondents who included Col. Robert Ingersoll, the American Secularist.

In 1895 twenty-eight-year-old Reginald John Campbell came to Brighton to accept his first charge at Union Street Church. The man who was to arouse one of the greatest furores from a pulpit in pre-war London was nominated for the National Liberal Club in Brighton by the ageing Secularist. Holyoake wrote to Gladstone in 1890, "In the days of Prof. F. D. Maurice and Canon Kingsley I never disputed with them, and do not do so with good priests. There is no need to make demands on the good, seeing that there are always enough of the other sort extant."⁵³ He was proud that the term "notorious atheist" was never applied to him.

One would have thought that the old irritability, that had so often in the past shattered the careful image of benign tolerance, had at last been conquered. But Mrs. Bonner, in serializing her life of Bradlaugh in *The National Reformer*, dug out the old antagonistic reports of her father and Annie Besant and assumed that Holyoake's attitude had been "one of profound personal antagonism to my father".⁵⁴ At seventy-nine, he answered the charges in a pamphlet, *The Warpath of Opinion*. It is rarely profitable to warm over old battles, and in the end Holyoake yielded to his friends' persuasion and withdrew it. Though the tone of the pamphlet was not judged to be such as would be helpful to the tottering Secularist movement, its conclusion was grudgingly generous to Bradlaugh:

The environment of his early life lent imperiousness to his manners. In later years when he was in the society of equals, where masterfulness was less possible and necessary, he acquired courtesy and a certain dignity—the attributes of conscious power. He was the greatest agitator, within the limits of the law, who appeared in my time among the working people.⁵⁵

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On Holyoake's death in January 1906 *The Christian Commonwealth* remembered him as a moderate in the Secular movement, an early martyr, and the father of English Co-operation. This was a modest enough estimate for one who had been in some way involved with almost every forward-looking movement in England from the Chartists to the pro-Boers. The irony of his life was that as "the father of English Co-operation" he could co-operate successfully only at some distance. He did not work easily in tandem. Yet to have reached the place where he could have used for himself "the attributes of conscious power" would have required gifts he did not possess—a kind of extroversion, perhaps; and true eloquence. Bradlaugh, who lacked many of the subtleties that Holyoake could appreciate, had these essentials for leadership. Even in the fifteen years after his death Holyoake could not escape his rivalry.

The decline of Secularism as a movement must be accompanied by a pathetic personal postscript. All these people had personal lives as well as public ones, and they could not all fully submerge themselves in the great waves of "the future". Nor were they all ready or able to adjust to the new morality which they steadfastly proclaimed.

We have noted Edward Bibbins Aveling as temporary editor in the midst of Foote's troubles. Aveling was the son of a Congregationalist minister. He is not an easy man to understand. It is an over-simplification to say, as Lewis Feuer does, that his "intellectual history is written in sexual terms", though there is certainly much background for the comment.⁵⁶ It is equally misleading to accept him simply as the prototype of Louis Dubedat in *The Doctor's Dilemma*. Shaw has announced clearly that he was that, and it is quite possible, as we shall see, that Shaw did not stop there. A good deal of surrounding material may have found its way into the play as well. But Shaw used these materials, as he always did, for his own ends. He did not intend them as history. The picture of Louis Dubedat, therefore, as charming and personable, and as an artist of undeniable genius, must not be confused with the picture of Edward Aveling.

There seems to be no doubt about his erudition, though it may

have been of a surface quality. His field was science, but he had a great store of literary and artistic knowledge as well. In 1879 (aged twenty-eight) he was lecturing on comparative anatomy at the London Hospital and teaching science at King's College, London University. He turned down a permanent chair there because it required church membership. In the early eighties he became Bradlaugh's principal scientific contributor to *The National Reformer*. He was also an amateur actor and had serious pretensions as a poet and playwright. He once managed a traveling troupe. He was elected to the London School Board on the secular and free education platform. Shaw found him "quite a pleasant fellow, who would have gone to the stake for Socialism or atheism, but with absolutely no conscience in his private life. And though no woman seemed able to resist him he was short, with the face and eyes of a lizard, and no physical charm except a voice like a euphonium."⁵⁷

Since Aveling was Bradlaugh's science editor, he became tutor to his daughters, and probably to Annie Besant, as both she and Alice Bradlaugh were preparing to ask for admission to the University. Feuer seems to have no doubt that for a time Annie was Aveling's mistress. And Havelock Ellis has perceptively noted that although Annie Besant has many flattering things to say about Aveling in her Autobiography—as a teacher, speaker, writer, reformer—she never speaks of their personal relationships or mentions Eleanor Marx, although both Aveling and Eleanor had been dead for some years before the publication of the Autobiography.⁵⁸ In 1882 Aveling began to frequent the Reading Room of the British Museum, which was practically a club for impoverished intellectuals. Bernard Shaw, still in relative obscurity, was in regular attendance, and he had already made the acquaintance there of Eleanor Marx, whom he found attractive and stimulating. They were also both members of the Browning Society. This relationship was companionate and perhaps flirtatious, nothing more. I do not know if Shaw actually introduced Aveling to Eleanor. In any case, it turned out that they had met at least once before.

Shaw did introduce Aveling to the Humanitarian, Henry Salt, and his wife. Salt was surprised to find a scientific socialist so emotional and sentimental. Aveling liked to read aloud, and

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when he read the last act of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, "he trembled and shook in his passionate excitement and then burst into sobs and tears".⁵⁹ Shelley was indeed his great love, and formed, with Marx and Darwin, the Trinity of his idolatry. Even so, for personal reasons, he would have been turned down for membership in the Shelley Society except that William Rossetti carefully guided his application through. Shaw reassured the circle that "if it came to giving one's life for a cause, one could rely on Aveling even if he carried all our purses with him to the scaffold".⁶⁰ *Shelley's Socialism* was the title of a paper which he and Eleanor Marx wrote and which was privately printed in 1888. Leslie Preger of Manchester has reissued it (1947).

His writing was lucid and rich in allusions. Like so much of Secularist writing it suffered alternately from a smart-aleck acerbity and an over-optimistic effulgence. In dealing with the twin curses of mankind, "Christianity and Capitalism", he saw the Christian Socialists merely as expedient priests.

The clergy with their usual acuteness, seeing the movement that is coming, and has already in fact begun, are taking it under their wing. That same patronage which they are now extending to the idea of Evolution, because they find the idea too strong for them, they are beginning to extend to the idea of Socialism for the same reason. Socialism like Science will do well to have nothing to do with them as clergymen. . . . Socialism has nothing to do with religion or irreligion.⁶¹

Aveling was clever. He separated the "Christianity" of unsavoury historical reputation from "the Christianity that is said to be that of Christ himself", and demolished them one at a time. In a different mood he refuted Tennyson's view of an Atheist in the poem "Despair", where the life of irreligion is

A life without sun, without health, without hope, without
any delight

In anything here on earth. . . .

"Without health, alas! man may be," Aveling responded.

Without hope man has no right to be. Because my little fragment of life is a failure, because my attempted contribution to the world-building is only some small modicum of dust, blown

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away by the breath of time and not a portion of enduring stone or marble, am I to despair of all? Nay, truly, let me rather behold the effective life-work of my stronger brothers, and, taking heart of grace, struggle on again.⁶²

In tone and outlook this is similar to Annie Besant, Austin Holyoake, and a score of other Secularists who sounded embarrassingly like the most old-fashioned of clergymen.

Aveling must have had scholarly ability when he chose to use it. Henry Salt's brother-in-law was J. L. Joynes, the translator of Marx's *Capital*. On Joynes's death Aveling took over that task. He was less successful with his creative writing. He was forever making obscure arrangements for some leading manager to produce one of his plays, and open his path to fame and fortune. Occasionally he was in a position to have some poetry published. These stanzas (1883) may have some special interest in view of the events that followed. They appeared in *Progress* while Aveling himself was editing and Foote was in jail.

They met, changed eyes. Changed hearts? Who knows?

One looked round first. Too late the other.

And by her was that cursed brother.

The first, last chance! Love comes and goes.

They met, changed eyes. Changed hearts? Who knows?

Turned, met again, again, were married.

Ah! well had both ere turning tarried!

That fatal day! Love comes and goes.⁶³

Eleanor Marx was contributing to some of the same issues of *Progress* in those days.

Aveling recalled that when he was quite young, perhaps twenty-two, he gave a lecture on insects and flowers at the Orphan Working School, Haverstock Hill, London. Afterwards three members of his audience were introduced to him. One was a medium-sized, powerfully built man "with a tremendous leonine head". This was Karl Marx. He met also his wife, Jenny von Westphalen, and the youngest of his daughters, Eleanor, who would then have been eighteen. Aveling did not appreciate Marx's greatness at that time. "The next time I saw him he was lying dead on the simple bed at 45 Maitland Park Road, Haver-

stock Hill. I stood by his corpse, hand-in-hand with my wife.”⁶⁴ Aveling was saying that in the meantime he had married Eleanor. This was not scrupulously correct, for in at least one of the dark corners of his past he already had a wife, of whose existence Eleanor was duly informed.

Eleanor was the sixth and last of Karl's children, born during his exile in London in 1855 at 28 Dean Street, Soho. The Marxes were poor, but they were helped materially by Friedrich Engels, whose family owned cotton mills in Manchester. There was also a small legacy from the Baroness of Westphalen. They moved the year after Eleanor's birth to a better neighbourhood, 9 Grafton Terrace, Maitland Park, Haverstock Hill. Eleanor, as the last of the line, was probably overprotected. She was sensitive and romantic. At five or six she was moved by the beauty of the Catholic Church. At eight or nine, after listening to grown-ups talk about the American Civil War, she would write letters to President Lincoln.

As a young woman she was lively, energetic, headstrong. She was especially fond of drama and literature and wanted to be an actress. She became a fine linguist, a translator of Ibsen and Flaubert. She also translated Lissagaray's *History of the Paris Commune of 1871*, with help from her father. She was sixteen when she met the French revolutionary author of this book, a political exile, and fell in love with him. But father disapproved. Marx was not happy about the marriages of his other two daughters: Jennie had married Longuet ("the last Proudhonist") and Laura had married Lafargue ("the last Bakunist"). He had no intention of losing his favourite "Tussy" to Lissagaray. There was no danger. Tussy worshipped her father and would not go against his wishes. Thereafter she devoted herself to caring for the ageing Karl. The founder of Communism did not want to see Eleanor become a "New Woman". He preferred domestic women like his wife.

But within three years, she had lost her father, her mother, and her sister, Jenny, and at twenty-seven found herself alone and free to live her own life. She became a New Woman with a rush. Her frank discussions of sex with her closest friend, Olive

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Schreiner, shocked even the advanced circles in which she now moved. She attended the literary clubs, particularly an Ibsen group, and read the part of Nora in the first private reading of *A Doll's House* in England. Shaw read Krogstad, and Aveling read Helmer. In 1884 Havelock Ellis first met her at J. C. Foulger's Progressive Association at Islington Hall. Not long after, Ellis also met Olive Schreiner, with whom he maintained an extended liaison.

The best picture of Eleanor Marx comes to us through him. The warm friendship between the two women gave Ellis the opportunity to observe both Eleanor and Aveling, and the reports he received through Olive's letters from 1885 to 1887 yielded further insights.⁶⁵ Eleanor had one remaining contact with the past. Friedrich Engels, for as long as he lived, tried to watch over her.

No one approved of the union except, strangely, Engels, whose approval was after the fact. Once Eleanor had cast her lot with Aveling, Engels's loyalty was complete. He probably did not know of the other wife, at least at first, but assumed, as Ellis did, that the "free marriage" was a matter of principle with both of them. Engels thought for a time that Aveling would be a valuable asset to Socialism. "This young man is very good," he wrote in March of 1884, "but he has too many irons in the fire, and is engaged in a wearisome struggle with his ex-friend, Bradlaugh."⁶⁶ Mrs. Besant was probably jealous and her disparaging remarks about Eleanor in *The National Reformer* may be judged accordingly. While the couple were first living together Bradlaugh had arrived in a cab one morning, demanded the return of Mrs. Besant's letters to Aveling, and got them. Eleanor related the incident to Ellis and Olive Schreiner apparently without compunction.⁶⁷

"Dr. Aveling and Miss Marx have just come to see me," wrote Olive Schreiner on 24 July 1884. "She is now to be called Mrs. Aveling. I was glad to see her face. I love her, but she looks so miserable." And this, Ellis pointed out, was her honeymoon. And on 2 August:

I am beginning to have such a *horror* of Dr. A. otherself [*sic*]. To say I dislike him doesn't express it at all; I have a fear and





A FATHER'S LOVE.

"Each link a father's love."—Popular Song.

"And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."—LUKE xvi., 24, 25.

Blasphemous Comic Bible Sketch from *The Freethinker*



THE RAISING OF LAZARUS.

And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth, And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin.—JOHN xi., 43, 44.

Blasphemous Comic Bible Sketch from *The Freethinker*

"Do not yet challenge the old and crumbling dynasty to die; you cannot expect it to commit suicide, and your weapons are not strong enough to fight it successfully. Republicanism is the hope of the future, but for the present——"

—C. B., *N. R.*, 26th Jan., 1868.

"Could I come near I'd set MY Ten Commandments in your face."

HENRY VI., pt. ii., i., 2.

"Much as I love power, much as I hunger for it and desire it, I should not like to-day to bear the heavy weight of authority in Ireland."

—C. BRAULAUGH, *N. R.*, 19th March, 1882.



"FOR TO-MORROW."—Motto of *N. R.*, August 22nd, 1875.

Mr. Bradlaugh in his letter to the Prince of Wales as a brother Freemason (13th June, 1869) says:—"Brother, before you die you will hear cries for a Republic in England. Whatever you determine to do, do quickly, or it will be too late."

"These are the tribunes of the people."—CORIOLANUS, iii., i.

a horror of him when I am near. Every time I see him this shrinking grows stronger. Now, you see, when I am at Bole Hill they come every day to see me. We shouldn't be much alone. And we have so many things to talk about. . . . I love her, but he makes me so unhappy. He is so selfish, but that doesn't account for the feeling of dread. Mrs. Walters has just the same feeling. I had it when I first saw him. I fought it down for Eleanor's sake, but here it is, stronger than ever.⁶⁸

When the Ellises and the Marx-Avelings (as she now signed herself) were a foursome at Bole Hill, Ellis always found Eleanor eager and full of enjoyment, in contrast to her private moods as she revealed them in her letters to Olive. When Olive left Bole Hill, the Marx-Avelings stayed behind for a time. Aveling lived freely at the inn, and left without settling the bill. At the Salts' the story was much the same. Henry's wife, Kate, who was known within their own circle to be a homosexual, was nevertheless fond of Aveling, and he did not hesitate to borrow money from her the moment Eleanor was out of the room.⁶⁹

In the summer of 1885 Eleanor wrote a long and intimate letter to Olive, confessing her deep insecurity. She knew of Aveling's philanderings, and expressed envy of his apparently carefree "child-like" nature. Their financial situation was hopeless. Aveling was trying to interest Beerbohm Tree in a play of his, and Eleanor went so far as to ask if Olive or Ellis could be of help in this venture. She wanted medical attention from her old family doctor, Dr. Donkin. She obviously felt she had nobody near at hand to turn to. Yet she endured and remained faithful for another thirteen years.

As to her loneliness, Ellis had done some investigating. Unlikely as it seems, he could find no negative impressions of Eleanor, nor any positive ones for Aveling. Their friends were not so conventional as to cut them for their living arrangements—to be called "respectable" was an insult. They simply couldn't stand Aveling. As to their poverty, Eleanor had been teaching, but insisted on explaining to the principal of her school the nature of her union at the outset. Later she complained that respectable people simply would not hire her.

Still they managed to survive. Engels involved Aveling more

and more in the affairs of the Socialist Labour Party and saw to it that he was compensated. Olive Schreiner sent Eleanor editorial work and copying to do, even from South Africa. But they had no way to meet emergencies. In 1885, when they were occupying a flat at 55 Great Russell Street, across from the British Museum, Aveling had an attack of gallstones. Ellis heard the news by way of Olive who begged him to see what could be done. "If he gets dangerously ill, I must go," she wrote. "If the Avelings are hard-up I must try to send them something, but I am hard-up myself just now."⁷⁰ Ellis found that William Morris had already offered help, both personally and financially. Ellis, who by this time had publishing connections, was successful in getting some translating for Eleanor—Ibsen's *Enemy of Society*, and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.

The trips to the United States which Engels had arranged for them under Socialist Labour Party auspices provided an expense account which Aveling seized upon and promptly overspent. American comrades (specifically Florence Kelly Wischniewsky) accused Aveling of behaving like a scoundrel, and demanded that Engels drop him from all the publications. Engels, of course, refused and assured the Americans he had known Aveling for four years and that he had proved himself a man of honour. He would have to have proof of Aveling's misdeeds, not mere innuendoes. Engels's real defence of Aveling rested on the shaky syllogism that if Aveling were guilty, then so would Eleanor be—and who could imagine the daughter of Marx swindling the working class?

But the Executive Committee in London was not as sanguine as Engels. Their computation of the fifteen-week expense account differed from Aveling's in the amount of 176 dollars. Aveling did not challenge the Committee. Somewhere he found the money and paid it. The Committee was not ready to let the matter drop, however, and prepared to censure him for plain forgery. Engels was furious. He told the Committee it would have to deal with the case simply as a "dispute about accounts" or make the charge public. And the charge would have to be dealt with by Eleanor since Aveling was too ill. But Aveling wrote piously to the Executive Committee in February of 1887: "I cannot discuss money matters with the Party, and I am ready

to accept anything without discussion that the National Executive of the SLP thinks right.”⁷¹

In the end the matter was glossed over and Engels was mollified, but Aveling's reputation with the Party was permanently tarnished. Hyndman in particular was convinced of Aveling's dishonesty, and Hyndman was not one to repress his feelings. Still the Marx-Avelings were back in America in the summer of 1888, on Party business, and Engels actually writes seriously to F. A. Sorge in the United States that “Aveling has shifted to the dramatic field with success and is to produce four plays over there in four cities (three and a half written by him)”.⁷² Naturally the plays were never heard of. But Engels still wielded enough influence to see that both his Tussy and Aveling were among those sent to Belgium in the summer of 1891 to look over trade unions there. The Socialist weekly, *Justice*, trying vainly to make a distinction between Eleanor and Aveling, asked Eleanor to write some reports on the international movement, but *Justice* had not been treating Aveling kindly, so she indignantly rejected the offer.

Engels, their last protector, died in 1895. He left Eleanor a legacy of 3,000 pounds. It does not seem much, considering his own inheritance from the Manchester cotton mills, and the strong sense of custody he had developed over the years since his partner's death. The Marx-Avelings had moved twice since 1882. Now they moved to a better neighbourhood in “Jew's Walk”, a suburb of Sydenham. Feuer suggests that this was Eleanor's choice, reflecting a desire to get back to patriarchal roots in a Jewish neighbourhood. Felix Barker, who made an independent investigation of Eleanor's life,⁷³ found that immediately on Engels's death she drew up a new will, leaving everything except royalties from her father's works to Aveling. The royalties were to go to the children of her late sister Jenny. But Aveling, against whom she apparently had no defences, persuaded her to include the royalties in his share as well.

At some point in this dismal history Aveling was taken critically ill—perhaps it was a recurrence of the gallstones—and was removed to Middlesex Hospital. Eleanor stayed beside him. Hyndman's wife pleaded with her to leave him as soon as he recovered, and she was apparently convinced. Instead she took

him to Margate to nurse him back to health. Unlike the story of *The Doctor's Dilemma*, the physician, Christopher Heath, successfully saved the scoundrel's life, much to the dismay of Tussy's friends.⁷⁴ (Feuer assumes that Jennifer Dubedat was also Shaw's picture of Eleanor Marx. Shaw never said so, but it would have been difficult for him to have imagined the character of Aveling, however altered, without its real-life complement. He knew them both quite well. And Feuer is, I think, right in observing that no other of Shaw's women lives with such complete passion.)

Unfortunately the story does not end as Shaw ended it. When Eleanor and Aveling had joined their lives, they made an agreement to marry if and when Aveling's former marriage could be dissolved. Now news came of the first wife's death. On 8 June 1897 at Chelsea, under the assumed name of Alec Nelson, Aveling married a twenty-two-year-old actress named Eva Frye, currently acting in a melodrama in which Aveling had some interest. It is not clear when Eleanor found out or was told of this final humiliation, but in the end she did know. She had nowhere to turn. Olive Schreiner, who had been back in England, returned to South Africa in 1889. Havelock Ellis married Edith M. O. Lees, who had also developed a friendship with Tussy. But at the time she too was away from London and could not reply promptly to Eleanor's urgent request to see her.

On Thursday morning, 31 March 1898, the maid, Gertrude Gentry, found her body dressed in white, with the empty bottle of prussic acid beside it. It was a duplication of the suicide of Emmy in *Madame Bovary*, which Ellis had secured for her to translate. The coroner's inquest disclosed that she had sent the maid to the chemist's with "Dr." Aveling's card. The chemist, assuming that Aveling was a medical doctor, sent back the acid and asked the maid to return the card with the doctor's initials. Eleanor initialled the card. Under questioning Aveling admitted that she had threatened to destroy herself "several times". At least once she had taken an overdose of opium. But actually Aveling was not living with her during the past ten months or more, and appeared at the flat less and less frequently. In desperation she had begged the son of her old nurse, Frederick Demuth, to attend meetings where Aveling might be found and

bring her news of him. It may be that she did not then know about the last marriage.

Shaw was of the opinion that Aveling knew very well she was going to take her own life, and took care that she should have every facility for ridding him of her. Hyndman never gave up his belief that it was a suicide pact Aveling had made with her and helped to set up—Aveling, of course, never intending to carry out his part of the bargain. If this was true it is unlikely that Eleanor really expected that he would. Her suicide letter, helpless and pathetic: "Dear: It will soon be over now. My last word is the same that I have said during all the long sad years—love."

Because she was Karl Marx's daughter, friends from Socialist groups in England and the Continent gathered for her cremation at Woking. Aveling displayed great grief. For many years her ashes were in the Karl Marx Memorial Library, London.

Four months later an old kidney disease caught up with Aveling. He died (said Shaw) spouting Shelley's *The Cloud*.

In 1912, the remaining Marx daughter, Laura, committed suicide with her husband, Lafargue, in their country home near Paris.

It all seems to belong to some mid-nineteenth-century Russian novel. The story is, as Feuer said, "hopelessly un-Marxian". As a philosopher, he speculates that the Marxian inheritance left a dearth of the kind of value-judgments necessary for survival.

Far away in Africa, not yet aware of the impending tragedy, Olive Schreiner saw a brutalized prisoner in chains. She shuddered and thought of Aveling.

2 *The London Positivists*

In 1888 one of the leading London Positivists lamented to his followers:

Forty years have already passed since Comte disclosed our religion, and gave us the most powerful and harmonious philosophy, and we remain a small number, almost unknown to the world around us, engaged in factional feuds which only tend to increase the general prejudice against religion.¹

The lament had become a familiar one. The London followers of Auguste Comte had never become affluent or numerous, and their internal rifts were often bitter. Yet the history of the reform movement, at least into the 1890s, is sprinkled with their names and their influence.

Moncure Conway, sometimes their admirer but never their disciple, recalled the story of the attempted suicide of Saint-Simon² who had set himself the task of creating a new society, a new Christianity, a new man. The French philosopher had envisioned a utopia with a Parliament of Industry, a Church of Science and Art, and universal education; but at the age of sixty he had to publish his own work, which did not sell, and he decided, about 1820, coolly to end his life. After he had bungled the job of shooting himself, Auguste Comte was among the friends who nursed him back to health, and it was Comte who completed the social scheme from Saint-Simon's framework.³

Comte was the most dogmatic of the scientific philosophers. He was confident that all phenomena could be observed and set into "laws"—including human phenomena. In fact, of all the sciences, he placed sociology the highest, and eventually devised a kind of worship of Humanity to be conducted by a scientific priesthood. Comte had an aversion to leaving anything in purely abstract form. He left behind him detailed instructions for the preparation of the new priesthood, various forms of worship, and a completely new calendar.

Year One of the Positive Era (P.E.) was the beginning of the

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French Revolution, 1789. Comte very sensibly divided a year into thirteen months of twenty-eight days each, plus one holiday, "the Festival of All the Dead", and on leap years an additional "Festival of Holy Women". He retained the seven-day week, but changed the names of the months to honour the great men of Western civilization:

1. Moses (the initial theocracy)
2. Homer (ancient poetry)
3. Aristotle (ancient philosophy)
4. Archimedes (ancient science)
5. Caesar (military civilization)
6. St. Paul (Catholicism)
7. Charlemagne (feudal civilization)
8. Dante (modern epic poetry)
9. Gutenberg (modern industry)
10. Shakespeare (modern drama)
11. Descartes (modern philosophy)
12. Frederick II (modern polity)
13. Bichat (modern science)

Every day of the month honoured someone in the field for which the month was named. In the month of *Homer*, for instance, each day honoured some ancient poet—the seventh days (Sundays) being reserved for positions of special respect. Thus *Virgil* (in the month of Homer) occupied a Sunday position, whereas *Juvenal* was a mere Friday. By this method holidays and anniversaries always recurred on the same days of the week.

This kind of precise organization, pursued in all the areas of life, carried with it the seeds of most of the dissension among the London Positivists; for there were some who were attracted by Comte's views of Science and Humanity who nevertheless rebelled against the strictures of his ritualism.

All the Positivists believed that Humanity was potentially the embodiment of the good and beautiful, and that somehow the realms of religion, science, and art were one. They talked a good deal about the Brotherhood of Man and the essential equality of all people, but they were not committed to any form of "democracy" as it was then practised. Nor were they supporters of Socialism. Eventually worker-problems would be authoritatively

settled by "Priests of Humanity", and capital would be efficiently handled by selected leaders of industry—reformed capitalists, not disinherited ones. Eventually, too, by discovery of the laws of science, man would establish a predominance of good over evil in the world. Their lot was cast with the forces of spiritual evolution rather than with those of political or economic revolution. They appealed to man's sense of duty rather than to his "rights".

In the meantime, in the less ideal world of Victorian London, they were generally content to support the demands of trade unions and reform legislation, and to oppose imperialism and militarism. On all these matters there was little disagreement in the various Positivist camps. And it was in their advocacy of these more immediate reforms that the Positivists became known to the British public—as when they vigorously scoured London to procure employment for the refugees from the Paris Commune in the wake of the War of 1870—causing the Socialist Hyndman to remark that though their theories were all wrong, their actions were all right.⁴

But "right" actions, if they are consistent, must proceed from theories that are not wholly whimsical, and in two ways, at least, the Positivists had caught hold of the spirit of the times. First, they wished as earnestly as the Secularists to be free of outworn superstitions. Yet they realized, as many Freethinkers seemed not to, that there could be no real progress without a sense of tradition. Their insistence on the role of tradition may have led them into incongruities which bordered on the farcical at times, but the recognition of their own roots in the past reflected a kind of wisdom and stability their rival societies did not regularly demonstrate.

The second quality that may have enhanced their judgment was their disciplined objectivity—what we would call their scholarship. Comte had insisted on the same attitude of mind in approaching the humanities as in approaching the sciences—an attitude which, when carried to extremes, led to a dogmatism that appeared, once again, ridiculous. But there is no doubt they were in the path that modern social science was to follow, and so were protected in part against the easy emotional answers which seemed good enough for most of their contemporaries. It was

possible, therefore, to take seriously Congreve's motto, "Order and Progress".

Consequently the Positivists were really influential in England (as the followers of Saint-Simon were in France). Often their influence was once-removed. For many years the *Fortnightly*, for instance, under John Morley, reflected the Positivist line so consistently that it was accused of being a Comtist organ.

The first noteworthy Englishman to show an interest in Comte was John Stuart Mill. After reading *Positive Philosophy* he wrote Comte a highly flattering letter. Comte, then living in isolation and in the depths of misfortune, responded with warmth. The exchange continued for five years (1841-46), but the friendship cooled long before Mill wrote his treatise on Comte in 1865. "While as logicians we were nearly at one," Mill wrote later, "as sociologists we could travel together no further."⁵

By the time of his *Auguste Comte and Positivism*,⁶ Mill was already observing that Comte's influence was greater in England than in France. Mill's own views as a social reformer naturally coloured his estimate of Comte. He found the French philosopher's influence generally "wholesome", but at the same time dangerous. In so far as the term *positive* meant a scientific view of the world Mill endorsed Comte without hesitation. He also agreed with Comte's placing of the Social Sciences at the apex of human knowledge and shared Comte's desire to make them more "positive", i.e. scientific. Mill was intrigued by Comte's endeavour to find a unified view of history, to balance the *statics* of society against the *dynamics* of society. He was uncomfortable about Comte's bland optimism—the very quality that made him popular with English reformers—the underlying assumption that, if men could know better, they would do better. Yet in this Comte differed from Mill only in degree.

It was Comte's "second career" that Mill seriously objected to, his transfiguration into the High Priest of the Religion of Humanity. This Mill clearly considered a psychological aberration resulting from Comte's unconsummated attachment to Mme. Clotilde de Vaux, whom he loved passionately for a year, at the end of which time the lady died. Comte, a changed man, thereafter cut himself off from his times, never reading a newspaper, living only with his thoughts and his notebooks. It was

not until this period in his life that Comte conceived of a religion without a God. Most people, Mill observed, would find this an absurdity, and most of the remainder would turn away from anything that called itself religion at all. "Between the two, it is difficult to find an audience who can be induced to listen to M. Comte without an insurmountable prejudice."⁷ This observation certainly proved to be justifiable.

Mill's objections to the "religious" phase of Positivism simply made articulate the vague uneasiness that most of his countrymen felt about the efforts to found a vigorous Positivist movement in London, and best explain why even its more liberal wing could never achieve the intellectual support and the popular momentum to establish a new "church". The chief stricture to Mill was that Comte's love of unity had grown into a demand for uniformity. All phases of existence had to be systematized, and to achieve such a goal people would have to become perfectly efficient creatures. Like Calvin, whom he despised, Comte wanted everyone to become a saint. The Catholic Church was much more reasonable, Mill pointed out, in not expecting all good Catholics to achieve sainthood. Comte's selection of 150 volumes as the basis for human knowledge was, for Mill, an insult. Yet Comte's self-confidence was so sublime that he planned the regeneration of Man to begin with the Emperor Napoleon's abdication in favour of a Positivist triumvirate. These three (selected, presumably, by Comte) would rule until France could be reorganized. The reconstituting of French society would take twenty-one years, during which time a kind of Positivist Pope would be selected as the supreme spiritual power, and the seventeen French Republics would each be delivered to the dictatorship of three bankers. Comte actually hoped to live to see many of these prophecies fulfilled, but he died at sixty, without any disciple sufficiently advanced to become his successor. Surviving disciples did elect Pierre Laffitte as "Director of Positivism".

In England the story of Positivism became largely the story of two men, Richard Congreve and Frederic Harrison, though E. S. Beesly and J. H. Bridges also played prominent roles.

Congreve was for a time a tutor of Harrison's at Wadham, Oxford. The elder man had taken Orders in the Church of

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England, but had slowly come under the influence of Comte's writings. He had gone to Paris in 1848 to confer with the philosopher, but it was not until 1854, when he was thirty-six years old, that he came to the conclusion that "even the broadest of Broad Church views were not compatible with Positivism". Thereupon he openly avowed his convictions, gave up orders, resigned his Fellowship, and went to London to devote himself to making Positivism more widely known among his countrymen. About the same time Harrison too gave up the idea of Holy Orders and shifted to the study of law. In 1855 Harrison made his own pilgrimage across the Channel to talk with Comte. It was his only interview with the master, for Comte died two years later, but the meeting had a lasting influence.⁸

Unique among the catalogue of London heretics, neither Congreve nor Harrison was impeded in his career by the need to make a living. Harrison, in fact, was heir to a sizeable fortune. Before coming under the influence of Congreve, he had been brought up as a "high-church" young gentleman and had made three trips abroad before he was fifteen. It was not Congreve's influence alone that caused him to question his orthodox background. He had attended lectures of Owen, Huxley, and Tyndall, and in Congreve's house he had met George Eliot and her consort, George Henry Lewes. In 1858 he set to work to get himself admitted to the Bar.

A year earlier he had joined the teaching staff of the Working Men's College, then only in its third year of operation. This institution had been founded by Frederick Denison Maurice, that remarkable theologian whose influence pervaded all of Victorian liberalism. Here Harrison was in company with John Ruskin, Dante G. Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, and Ford Maddox Brown. Despite such brilliant colleagues he became dissatisfied with the College after a few years. In the first place he noted that the students were not really working men but rather middle-class climbers. Then he was disturbed because the classes were not organized under a single unified plan—his disturbance betrayed a kind of rigidity of mind that continually seemed at odds with his own tendency towards dissent.

Harrison never regarded himself as an outstanding public speaker (and the consensus of listeners supported him), yet he

continued to be sought after as a lecturer all his life—a tribute to his conscientiousness in organizing and presenting his material. At Holyoake's invitation he delivered a series of lectures on "A Positive View of History" to Secularist audiences.

But his chief influence was in print. Harrison's response to *Essays and Reviews* in 1860 was first entitled *Neo-Christianity*. His article took the position that the seven authors had, in effect, renounced Christianity because they had obviously followed the "Higher Criticism" of the Continent in turning away from the historical Jesus toward an idealized man-made "spiritual Christ". The success of the seven in avoiding any official Church censure for their heresy established a new freedom—but, according to Harrison, their success was at the expense of honesty. It seemed to many besides Harrison that the views of these clerics were so far outside orthodoxy as to amount to an "unavowed repudiation of Christianity as a dogmatic religion".⁹ Later editions of Harrison's review appeared under the more startling title, *Septem Contra Christum*. When essayists Wilson and Williams were prosecuted by the orthodox, Harrison gave time, money, and assistance in their behalf, but he did not cease to marvel that "the Establishment . . . still continues to enjoy its vast revenues and its exclusive ascendancy; whilst still sheltering all and any opinions—from veiled Catholicism to a vague Deism, and all the shades intermediate between both."¹⁰

Still under thirty, Harrison was not as sure of his views as was Congreve. Throughout the sixties he wrote for the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Fortnightly Review*, drifting closer and closer to the Positivist position. In 1867, in his rooms in Lincoln's Inn, he and some friends established the Positivist Political and Social Union, with Richard Congreve as the first president. Then in 1870 Congreve opened a small hall in Chapel Street—first calling it the Positivist School. With some reservation Harrison at first supported his old tutor.

Congreve, in the intervening years, had come to accept the complete Comtist "package". To this the notion of a priesthood was central. In Comte's plan it required seven years to study for the priesthood, and another seven to serve as a "vicar". Full priesthood came at the age of forty-two. Priests were to be more than a clergy. Besides preaching and conducting services and

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administering sacraments, they were to give counsel, create works of art, be physicians, mould opinion, and be teachers. Marriage would be compulsory.

The English Positivists never produced such a priest, but Congreve himself served in kind without the title. As Mill had been shocked to discover, the plan called for an entire priestly class, with high priests, and even a supreme pontiff. In this rather rigid Utopia the capitalists would form a second class—carefully watched over for possible abuse of the power of wealth. Then there would be the workers, and finally the women, who, to be sure, would all be exquisitely educated, but whose place would be in the home.

All its rituals were drawn from the past; it was to be, in fact, the successor to all past religions. "Humanity" was to be the Great Being to replace the old concept of God, and this Great Being should be worshipped by special prayer and meditation. As icons Comte suggested the image of Mother (for veneration), Wife (for attachment), Daughter (for kindness). Though their activities were circumscribed, women were regarded as morally superior to men and for this reason kept at the centre of family life. For Positivists worship meant an attitude of submission, reverence, the "habit of looking up to something better than ourselves". Liturgy had a place in this worship, and so did sacraments, which they accepted as "plain and simple recognitions that the principal events in private life have more than private bearing".¹¹ The sacraments were:

<i>Presentation:</i>	a substitute for Baptism
<i>Admission:</i>	similar to Confirmation
<i>Destination:</i>	at age twenty-eight, celebrating the choice of a vocation
<i>Marriage:</i>	
<i>Maturity:</i>	at age forty-two
<i>Retirement:</i>	at sixty-three
<i>Transformation:</i>	at death
<i>Incorporation:</i>	seven years after death if the life was judged worthy.

Women, by nature of their role, were not eligible for Destination or Retirement. But, peculiarly, they were not eligible for Maturity either.

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In regard to the last-named sacrament, the priesthood was to decide on one of three levels of honour for the deceased, a decision to be noted on the tombstone. If Incorporation was to be celebrated, the seven-year-old remains were removed to an honorary burial ground. Otherwise they were left in peace. For a few, however, who might meet with very unfavourable judgment even after the passage of the years, the remains would be disinterred and taken to special "waste places". To such an end Scientific Rationalism had brought the concept of Heaven and Hell!

To avoid the ruin of Western civilization there would have to be a new union of Church and State. The Catholic Church had had the right approach, but it was now in a state of decay, fit only for the weak and timid. Now that the world was emerging from the long period of theocracy and fetishism the Universal Church would have to be "non-theological". The new Church would help mankind with his three great problems: to subordinate progress to order, analysis to synthesis, and egoism to altruism.¹²

As an example of how seriously Comte regarded ritual, consider this advice to an American disciple:

The recitation of our fundamental formula with the right hand placed successively on the cerebral organs . . . the left hand placed on the heart . . . then we have our flag. And Positivists have the right to wear a green ribbon on their left arms, and to suspend from their necks a statuette of Humanity resembling the image of the Virgin Mary—a resemblance which will help in the transition from the worship of the Virgin to the worship of Humanity.¹³

It is evident through all this that Comte was something of a medievalist, having great respect for the procedures of the Catholic Church. The French Revolution had, however, marked the end of Church influence and called for the beginning of a new era. There was truth in Thomas Huxley's quip that Positivism was Catholicism minus Christianity.¹⁴

From 1872 to about 1877 the room at Chapel Street was put to use one day a week as an elementary school for all ages. The Positivists taught no religion and charged no tuition. They eventually abandoned the service as state and voluntary agencies enlarged to meet such needs.¹⁵

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Back at Comte's old house at 10 Monsieur-le-Prince in Paris, the mecca of Positivism, Laffitte was in charge of Comte's affairs. Laffitte, like most of Comte's followers, emphasized the social and ethical aspects of Positivism rather than the ritualistic-religious ones. He was under constant pressure from Congreve across the Channel to guide the movement into more "orthodox" ways.

In that era of high individuality and strong personal loyalties, it seemed inevitable that splits between a right and left wing should be built into practically every dissenting society. The internal schisms were often so bitter that the energies originally gathered to assault the Establishment were consumed within the bounds of the organizations themselves. The "Catholic-Protestant" division which Davies had noticed in the Secular movement was even more distinct among the Positivists. Their principal historian, John Edwin McGee, glosses over much of the bitterness. But "The Positivist Papers" have now been deposited in the British Museum, and it is abundantly clear that if Positivism had spread over Europe as Comte had dreamed, instead of being confined within a few small halls in London, the religious wars would have been refought. The Papers, by the way, are voluminous, and indicate once again how seriously these people took themselves, scrupulously retaining every set of minutes and every piece of correspondence for posterity. Posterity, I am afraid, will regard them as quaint cranks, and the "principles" over which they fought mere foolishness.

Correspondence shows that the differences were present ten years before the actual division into two societies. Congreve consistently represented the religious and ritualistic Comte; Beesly and Harrison the earlier scientific philosopher. This precipitated a squabble over the marriage vows, for instance. Congreve also thought in terms of ecclesiastical rank, and resented those who "went over his head" to communicate directly with Pierre Laffitte in Paris. But when the pastor of the Church of Humanity drew up a kind of catechism for Positivists in 1878 and tried to rally all "true Comtists" around him, Laffitte sided with the protesting group against the "Catholicism" of Congreve.

As with the Secularists, the personal lives of these people

were closely involved in their struggles for their beliefs. Beesly suffered greatly in breaking with his old friend and mentor.

Our friendship which has existed during the greater part of my life has been on my side singularly warm and deep,—I venture to believe on yours also. If your renunciation of it had been motivated solely by the events of last week I might have remonstrated and asked you to reconsider your determination. . . . The advantage has been all on my side. You have done much for me—I nothing for you. You have taught me, advised me, taken my part without regard to consequences when I most sorely needed support; lastly you have given me the example of your life and character which, on some sides, would that I could say on all, is the highest model that it has been my privilege personally to observe. . . . I dwell with pleasure on such expressions of kindness as occur in your letter. My intercourse with you in future will be such as you think fit to make it, both in kind and degree.¹⁶

Another of the “Protestants”, J. H. Bridges, likewise refused to sit longer at Congreve’s feet:

It is no doubt partly the effect of my manner, yet I think not wholly so, that with you I have always felt it is difficult to give an opinion adverse to your own, without its being regarded as a more or less distinct act of hostility.¹⁷

Congreve, the elder and “original” English Positivist, was somewhat in the position of Holyoake among the Secularists. It was difficult for him not to sound paternalistic and condescending. After the London Positivist Committee had been duly established with Laffitte’s blessing, Congreve wrote to his old friend, Beesly, as from on high,

In the present state of our affairs and seeing the turn things are taking, as indicated by a letter from Harrison, I wish to ask a simple question to which I am sure you will give a direct and simple answer. If we meet, are we, you and I, that is, to meet on a friendly footing or as strangers? It will be better to know beforehand, so avoiding an unpleasant uncertainty.

Yours very truly,
Richard Congreve¹⁸

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After the split, Congreve adopted the name of "The Church of Humanity" for the Chapel Street rooms, and quietly dropped the "Positivist School". He tried now to build up a complete church liturgy, modelled after the Church of England, with music, collects, and sermon based on some devotional reading—often from Comte. Still Congreve could never go as far as he would have liked. The Church, Quin reported, was only a Church in name. The members were not in basic agreement. It was only Congreve who held them together. On the questions of prayer and priesthood there was never a clear mandate. "The history of Positivism, in fact, has been largely a history of ambiguities and illusions."¹⁹ Direct prayers to Humanity were adopted, but there were no hymns. Congreve said the congregation was too small, but it was Quin's opinion that they were the sort that felt hymn-singing was beneath them. They would not kneel for prayer. And Congreve would never venture to wear vestments; he remained in ordinary morning coat.

At the end of forty years' ministry Congreve's forms of worship had not advanced beyond a sort of modified service of the Church of England. He was not a creative or imaginative leader. Still, Quin felt he was the only one of Comte's followers who accepted the master wholeheartedly and unreservedly. In middle life he studied medicine and earned a doctor's degree because Comte included medicine as part of the priest's preparation.

He remained, even in old age, a commanding figure. The Quaker, Spence Watson, called him "a holy old man". But he was no orator. Though his voice was agreeable in conversation, it was unimpressive from the pulpit. His language and delivery were old-fashioned. He was courteous and dignified. His wife might have stepped from the pages of Jane Austen. Instead of attracting adherents from all over the world, it is not surprising that he retained only a small personal following. His chief French disciple, Audiffrent, severed his connection in 1881. In 1879 he himself estimated the total number of Comte's "complete disciples" as two hundred—world-wide. There were, the year before, only 157 subscribers to the "Sacerdotal Fund" instituted at Comte's death.

For a time the Church of Humanity had branches of sorts. At

a Positivist Conference at Chapel Street in 1884, Quin remembered representatives from Liverpool, Newcastle, Birmingham, Leicester, "and perhaps one or two other places". A George Findley set up a little Church in Edinburgh, but it did not last long. In 1883 Positivism was exported to Brazil and Chile and was reported to have had some success there, but without contact with the London Church. C. Kegan Paul, the publisher, was for a time a member of Congreve's Church, but he later moved to Roman Catholicism. Quin himself received the "Sacrament of Destination" at Chapel Street in 1885, making him an "Aspirant Positivist Priest". He knew of only one other such Aspirant, one who had received the sacrament at the same time. In the years that followed Quin lost all track of him.²⁰

The ubiquitous Moncure D. Conway recalls attending the leap-year Festival of Holy Women on the morning of 31 December 1880. He counted forty-eight persons, two-thirds of them ladies of distinction and wealth. He returned the next day, New Year's Day, for the Festival of Humanity to find that the attendance had risen to sixty. The small room was half wainscoted. The walls were lined with sculptured heads of great men. The pulpit was set off with flowers and an engraving of the Dresden Madonna. There was a new small organ in the building. Congreve read Biblical passages and a Comtist prayer to which the congregation responded, "Amen." The benediction, as he recalled it, was "The Faith of Humanity, the Hope of Humanity, the Love of Humanity bring you comfort, and teach you sympathy, give you peace in yourselves and peace with others, now and forever, Amen."²¹ Conway found all this "pathetically picturesque", and as incomprehensible as any dogmatic religion, but he had great respect and admiration for the practitioners on both sides of the schism, and he made them welcome in his own Freethinking pulpit at South Place Chapel.

Congreve seemed able, for a time, to draw on building funds and subsidies collected both in England and abroad to hold his flock together. But though the number of his subscribers rose steadily, they remained fewer than 150 at the time of his death in 1899, and they declined sharply thereafter. Like Comte himself he left no successor, but Malcolm Quin has detailed how he continued to lead his own Positivist Church at Newcastle nearer

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and nearer to Catholicism, having instituted a formal mass. He had, in fact, some brief correspondence with the Catholic Modernist, Father George Tyrrell. Quin thought in terms of Tyrrell's trying to make Catholicism more "Positive", while he was trying to make Positivism "Catholic". It is doubtful that Tyrrell would have accepted this analogy. In any case they both failed. Quin was forced to give up his Church in March 1910. It was sold to the Catholics—properly or ironically, as one chooses to see it. It had, Quin said, most of the Catholic marks on it.

When Harrison and his group no longer felt themselves a part of Congreve's Chapel Street congregation, they experimented with a few temporary meeting places, and settled finally in an old hall in Fleur-de-lis Court, off Fetter Lane, Fleet Street, which they leased for twenty-one years from the Royal Scottish Corporation, and called it Newton Hall. It opened on the first of May 1881 with Laffitte present for the occasion. It was a lacklustre room, but it had busts of Comte and of Newton, and a portrait of the Sistine Madonna—who, for some reason, was accepted as the "personification of Humanity". Actually Laffitte had appointed Bridges as president of the new Committee,²² but after two years he withdrew in favour of Frederic Harrison, who remained its head until 1905, and who "gave Positivism such vogue and prestige in the world," Malcolm Quin admitted, "as it has actually enjoyed." Quin was well aware that after the split, the real men of distinction and appeal, except for Congreve himself, had left Chapel Street.²³

Hereafter the group was known in the Press under variant labels: the English Positivist Committee, the London Positivist Committee, the London Positivist Society, the Newton Hall group—creating the impression that the handful of Positivists was even further fragmented.

Newton Hall never called itself a Church, but over the years it did accrete some liturgy and music, carefully avoiding, however, the high-church atmosphere of Chapel Street. Some of the festivals of the Comtist calendar were celebrated. Unlike their Chapel Street cousins, they joined the Secularists in singing hymns. Frederic's wife, Ethel B. Harrison, contributed a book of

them, *Service of Man* (1890), including some of her own authorship. Vernon Lushington also composed a book of *Positivist Hymns* (Chiswick Press, 1885), but it would seem that these were too long for actual use in the course of a service. One of the more disarming practices of the Newton Hall group was their frequent pilgrimages—for a day, or several days, with numbers up to eighty—to the graves or tombs or houses of the mighty dead to foster “reverence” and “gratitude”. Chaucer, Bunyan, Shakespeare, Darwin, Cromwell, Thomas More, William Harvey, Penn, Bacon were among the shades so honoured. Education remained the Hall’s primary purpose, centring around series of evening classes and lectures. The list of lecturers, all unpaid, is long and impressive. As in the earlier days at Chapel Street, there were no fees, no examinations, no certificates. Comte’s recommended library of 150 great books was, of course, available for loan.

In addition Newton Hall was a clubhouse for social and political action. Aloof as the Positivists were to Socialism and Women’s Rights, they were among the most consistent and outspoken of the Home Rulers and anti-imperialists, even in the face of the wave of jingoism that swept England during the Boer War. Some had organized the Anti-Aggression League, a short-lived protest launched in February 1882. It collapsed in despair when Gladstone allowed the occupation of Egypt. In the nineties a Women’s Guild administered direct relief to London workers, dispensing education, wholesome amusement, and general uplift.

Like its Chapel Street rival, Newton Hall attempted to reach out beyond its home base. A North London group in 1882 began with help from both branches but swung towards the Newton Hall approach. It persevered for about ten years. A Manchester branch begun in 1884 continued into the new century.

The number of subscribers at Newton Hall itself is not known, but the treasurer was collecting annual contributions of between 350 and 800 pounds up until the end of the century. A good part of this (200 pounds in 1884) went to Laffitte to support the upkeep of the room and building associated with the Founder in Paris.²⁴

Perhaps because Positivist leaders had little trouble in secur-

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ing what space they needed in various periodicals of the day, *The Positivist Review* did not make its bow until January 1893 (Moses 1, 105, that is). It ran until 1925. Beesly was its first editor and principal contributor, though Harrison ran him a close second. It was obviously an organ of the Newton Hall group. As would be expected, it followed the liberal wing in politics, but carefully refrained from endorsing any political party. The *Review* referred only casually to Positivism, hoping to spread its political ideas to larger audiences than those which attended either Newton Hall or The Church of Humanity. Occasionally Special Supplements appeared—one on “The Causes of Modern Militarism”, for example. This took the position that modern militarism began with a wrong turn in 1870, and declared that “The work of the mere preachers of peace is neither useful nor hopeful.” Looking back to 1882 it scored the position of the Quaker M.P., John Bright, for remaining in the government while Britain made unjust demands against Egypt and threatened Alexandria with its fleet, then righteously withdrawing when the first shot was fired.²⁵ It is difficult to estimate how successful the *Review* was, but it remained on the scene years after the various Positivist societies had disappeared or become ineffective.

Indeed it is only the high regard accorded to the written and spoken words of individual Positivists that now arouses curiosity about their philosophy and organizations. It is amazing, considering his singular lack of any gift of oratory and the general stodginess of his literary style, how pervasive the words and ideas of Frederic Harrison were throughout a half century. “It was one of the great experiences of life,” Conway recalled,

to pick one’s way along the narrow and dingy purlieus leading out of the Strand and pass by an alley into the little hall with the grand name where Frederic Harrison, without any trick of gesture or rhetoric, made every mind and heart one with his own in sympathy, and for the happy hour, one in thought.²⁶

Conway recounted, too, the calm reassuring behaviour of Harrison when his wife fell seriously ill in 1884, and how their Positivist faith seemed to bring comfort to them both.

Beatrice Potter’s family knew and admired the Harrisons socially. They were, she reported in her diaries, well-to-do and

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personally attractive, "full-fledged members of political society". Harrison taught the young Beatrice the economics of trade unions and factory legislation. But the Potters were not as impressed as Conway was with Harrison's public performance. One of her sisters said of Positivism, "Heavens, Beatrice, what does it mean? It is just underbred theology with no bishops to bless it." And when Beatrice heard Harrison speak in 1889 the performance seemed to her to be forced. She recognized an element of good sense in it, but she thought it "an effort to make a religion out of nothing, a pitiful attempt by poor humanity to to turn its head around and worship its tail".²⁷

In 1880 Harrison had left his law practice and many of his avocational interests to devote himself to Positivism as a vocation, because, as Martha Salmon notes, "the programme of social regeneration it offered seemed to him the only answer to the deterioration of political morality which he saw reflected in the rise of imperialism".²⁸ Though Harrison was an eminent person, he was not a strong leader in the sense of identifying his movement with himself. Professor Beesly was almost as well known in London circles as Harrison, and had long been identified with social reform. Hyndman reported that Beesly was one of the few people who knew Karl Marx at all well in England. He was a popular choice to chair debates—and public debates in Victorian London were frequent. We have already noted that he chaired one between Hyndman himself and Charles Bradlaugh; and although Beesly did not support Socialism as such, the Socialist Hyndman wrote that "he was admired and even revered by advanced men of all shades of opinion for his splendid and courageous work on behalf of the oppressed of every country".²⁹

Harrison lectured at the Newton Hall Sunday meetings for about two months every year from 1880 to 1904. He admitted that his lectures may have been dull, but he placed great weight on the concept of their being systematic. The purpose was always to impart knowledge, not to amuse or excite; and the knowledge was systematic, not desultory. People who attended the Newton Hall lectures (his own and others) over the twenty-year period had, he maintained, a systematic view of history, science, and literature that more than equalled an ordinary Bachelor of Arts degree.³⁰

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Harrison had a good deal of background in the social reform movement prior to the opening of Newton Hall in 1881. Following his activities with the Working Men's College, he had helped (with Beesly) to mediate the building workers' strike in 1861. This involved trips to investigate the unemployment areas and led them both into some of the basic statistics of the chronic urban depression. We have already seen how Harrison's reports stirred Charles Booth to make his important study. Harrison found himself writing for working-class papers, as well as trying to educate the gentry in economics in the *Fortnightly*. He defended unions and supported their programmes of economic reforms, but, like many another reformer of the period, he held that moral regeneration was the essential key to real progress. Consequently he opposed the idea of a Labour Party, and kept urging Labour to use the existing parliamentary parties. In the midst of the Russian Revolution he was still arguing:

"A Labour Party", by assuming that title, proclaims that it is entering on a war of class; and a war of class is a civil war. I say war, for they well know that the avowed programme of the Labour Party will never be accepted by the property and trading classes until they are overcome by force. And these powerful forces are not so helpless and so craven as in Russia.³¹

When, under the direct influence of Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, the trade unions endorsed the nationalization of land, Harrison broke off his association with them. He had never believed that Capital had the right to amass wealth by whatever means it chose, or to spend it in purely selfish pursuits, but he believed fundamentally that a landed capitalist class was essential to civilization.

Harrison was friendly through the mid-seventies with John Ruskin. He failed to get the great critic to read Comte, but considered him none the less on the way to becoming a good Positivist. Harrison's visits and letters continued through Ruskin's periods of temporary insanity until his death in 1900. He later wrote a Ruskin biography.

Certainly Harrison's own life was a model of Positivist propriety, harmony, and repose. He remained single until he was

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thirty-nine, waiting patiently for the maturity of his first cousin, Ethel Berta Harrison.³² The marriage was free from any known discord. They had four sons and a daughter between 1871 and 1886. Both by Harrison's own account and by that of his son, Austin, they lived in the manner prescribed by Comte for a Positivist community.

As an elderly man in 1901 he was invited to give the Washington's Birthday Address at the Union League Club of Chicago—the first time a non-American was asked. This led to a thorough tour of America. To usher him about in New York was (once again) Moncure Conway, returned for a space to his own country. As part of the unexpected red-carpet treatment, Conway introduced him to the Authors' Club. Harrison wrote to his wife: "They talked as if I were Carlyle, Ruskin, Gladstone, and John Burns in one. . . ." He told them that at home he hardly counted as an "Author", but as a crank who lectured a small lot of fanatics in a dingy hole.³³

It is unlikely that the modesty was false. Austin wrote his recollections after his father's death. His book has charm, informality, and humour—traits he did not inherit from his father. There was no informality between the generations. For all his politically advanced ideas, Frederic Harrison was in his personal life a true Victorian. He was, for example, rigidly puritan in his sex ethics. Replying to young Austin's questions on the subject, he announced simply that a man respected a woman's virtue or he was a cad. There were a lot of cads about then, Austin observed, and his father solemnly agreed with that. Complete to type Frederic Harrison even had in his desk the manuscript of an original play called *Nicephorus*, which showed, Austin tells us, complete disregard for any stage technique. Perhaps he had more than one, though the play Wilfred Scawen Blunt recalled as *Theophano* may be the same one, for it was also Byzantine, and Blunt regarded it as purely spectacular, doubting if any manager would take it.³⁴ Yet the elder Harrison was rather hurt when Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree praised it warmly and turned it down.

Blunt, the poet-adventurer, was on easy terms with the Harrisons. He recalled dropping in on them on a mid-July day in 1896 and finding Harrison playing cricket with his sons. The

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sixty-five-year-old philosopher then engaged Blunt in a set of lawn tennis. They spent the evening in half-serious humour discussing "his creed of Humanity and mine of anti-Humanity". Politically they were, for the moment, in agreement. They both hoped for the speedy break-up of the British Empire. "He has some right to believe in Humanity," wrote Blunt, whose life was shot through with illnesses and suffering, "as he has never had a pain or ache or a sleepless night in his life and he is past sixty." There was nobody, Blunt concluded, less like a philosopher or religious leader than "the good Harrison".³⁵

Of all the Agnostics of the Victorian Age Austin felt that his father was "the most philosophically Christian in spirit and guiding motive".³⁶ But perhaps the most revealing picture of Frederic Harrison's spirit was the scene Austin recalled during World War I:

When my brother lay wounded and dying in a hospital in France, my father, though he was then eighty-four, insisted on going to his bedside, and sat with him to the last. I met him at the station on his return. His calm was astonishing: "I would not let the chaplain come in and pray," he said. "I told him that if he thought his prayers could help the dead, he could pray outside," and the steel in his eyes shone.

I asked him if he was tired. "Tired!" he exclaimed, "Why should I be? I had a snooze on the train."³⁷

Popular and respected as they were personally, and useful as they were politically, the Positivists never had the established intellectual community's support for their basic beliefs. Thomas Huxley, like J. S. Mill, saw that Positivism was dangerously authoritarian. Huxley scolded Comte, too, for his basic ignorance of modern science. Ruskin was disturbed by what he thought was Positivism's endorsement of material progress and ugliness. His exchange with Harrison on the subject is recorded in *Fors Clavigera*. Herbert Spencer distrusted Comte's passion for regulating humanity, and deplored his colossal vanity.

Though the world has grown indeed more secular and more scientific, and though the scientist has become a kind of high priest in our midst, humanity has not developed along Comtist lines. Since the days of the Church of Humanity and Newton Hall

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human society has not evolved towards the more neatly formed realms the Positivists believed in and hoped for, but has proceeded to shatter all forms, so that we seem to be, even as our knowledge expands and explodes, in a perpetual race against chaos. It is no wonder that the Positivists have felt less and less at home.

In 1902 the lease ran out for Newton Hall, and the Harrisonians moved to Clifford's Inn, off Fleet Street. In 1909 they moved to Lincoln's Inn Fields. Pierre Laffitte died in 1903, signalling the end of organized Positivism on the Continent. Bridges died in 1906, Beesly in 1915. In the midst of World War I what remained of both branches patched up a truce back at Chapel Street.

In his ninety-second year, having virtually outlived the movement, Frederic Harrison died in 1923. Dismissing the possibility that future Positivists might wish to remove his remains, under the rite of Incorporation to some more honoured ground, he had specified that his ashes, mingled with those of his wife, should remain in an urn in the chapel of Wadham College, Oxford.

3 Freethought Congregations: South Place and others

When Moncure Daniel Conway accepted the pastorate of South Place Chapel in February of 1864 it was one of those rare encounters between man and institution which seem predestined. One wants to defy the cliché and call it frankly a love affair, or say that they were made for each other. Heretical London never produced a more felicitous union. The energies set loose made the old Unitarian chapel in Finsbury the most pleasantly invigorating stopping place in metropolitan Infidelity for nearly two decades.

It was all the more remarkable in that they had both come so far to meet one another. Conway did not create South Place in the sense that Bradlaugh created the National Secular Society,

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nor initiate a movement as the Positivists had tried to do, nor found a new Church after being tossed out of an old one as Voysey was about to do. Consequently the stresses that continually pulled at the fabric of so many of the dissenting groups were happily minimal.

The congregation had a history of liberalism for seventy years. The Society began as the Philadelphians in 1793 under an American, Elhanan Winchester, in reaction to Calvinism. It became Unitarian under William Vidler in 1802. William Johnstone Fox accepted the charge in 1816 with the understanding that the congregational bond should be virtue rather than faith. Fox had made the South Place pulpit famous for forty years, preaching a kind of humanized theism.

Fox laid the first stone of South Place Chapel on 22 May 1822. It was dedicated the following February. In those days the ground and building cost less than 5,000 pounds. It was a "good plain design, marred only by the high-backed pews which had to be endured for fifty years".¹ It had deep galleries and seated altogether about a thousand. Conway pronounced the acoustics excellent. At the time of the building Finsbury was still a residential area and well-to-do people lived there. Some of the congregation came from the suburbs that were spreading eastwards. It was a "carriage" clientele.

Among Fox's congregation were the Flower sisters, Eliza and Sarah, who were left to the pastor's guardianship when their father died in 1829. The household became a cultural centre, the young Robert Browning occasionally calling and disturbing Sarah with his philosophic probings. Both sisters wrote poetry and hymns. Sarah was the author of "Nearer My God to Thee". Leigh Hunt and William Hazlitt attended the Chapel. With Eliza's help Fox edited a *Monthly Repository* for some years, turning it over to Hunt in 1836. The rather melodramatic story of the involvement of Fox, the Flower sisters, Harriet Martineau, John Stuart Mill, Harriet and John Taylor, and Robert Browning with the *Monthly Repository* and with each other is detailed in Michael St. John Packe's *The Life of John Stuart Mill*.² Obviously it had more of a literary flavour than most church publications.

Eliza Flower was twenty-six when left to the pastor's "care", and it is hardly surprising that her presence in the household

disturbed the stability of Fox's marriage. It soon became known to intimates that Mrs. Fox kept separate quarters upstairs, and had indeed asked for a formal separation, but at the time Fox did not feel he could afford the upkeep of two households. Finally when sister Sarah left in the summer of 1833 to marry William Bridges Adams, Mrs. Fox made a formal complaint to the South Place congregation. The membership, however, proud of their liberal tradition, largely sided with the pastor. But such are the mysteries of Victorian morality that when, immediately afterwards, Fox made a settlement on his wife and moved off with Eliza to Bayswater, many of his previous supporters were shocked and turned against him. Fifty families withdrew from the Chapel. Even so, he held firm to his charge and his congregation eventually increased.

It was not his love for Eliza that caused the decline at South Place; it was his love for politics. Fox became involved in radical reform movements and entered Parliament in 1847. South Place, neglected, cast about for a successor, but found only interim ministers. Membership dropped and debts rose. By 1860 there was the grim possibility that South Place would have to close its doors. Conway's arrival had the added dramatic quality of being in the nick of time.

Moncure Conway started life in 1832 in the atmosphere and tradition of the American Southland.³ His earliest religious influences were blended from Methodist salvationism, Negro otherworldliness, and (somehow) Ralph Waldo Emerson. From Virginia he had been sent "north" to college and must have shown some brilliance as a student for he had received an M.A. from Dickinson College, Pennsylvania, at the age of seventeen. He dropped naturally into the vocation that he was to pursue, with unforeseeable variations, throughout a long life. He became a Methodist circuit-rider, carrying the word of God to isolated farms and villages.

His circuit took him past Sandy Spring, Maryland, where he discovered a settlement of Hicksite Quakers. The "Hicksite" meant that they were followers of Elias Hicks, and therefore given more to trusting the message of the "inner light" than the literal words of the Bible. But when Moncure asked the Quaker elder, Roger Brooke, he was told solemnly that the

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Orthodox Quakers believed that the Devil had horns, whereas Hicksites insisted that he was an ass. Whatever the Sandy Spring Hicksites were, they proved the beginning of the Methodist preacher's undoing. His curiosity brought him to one of their meetings.

After a half-hour's silence a venerable man of very striking appearance, over six feet in height and his long head full of force, arose, laid aside his hat, and in a low voice, in strange contrast with his great figure, uttered these words: "Walk in the light while ye are children of the light, lest darkness come upon you." Not a word more. He resumed his seat and hat, and after a few minutes' silence shook hands with the person next him; then all shook hands and the meeting ended.⁴

Conway rode on to his next appointment, but the mystical experience of the meeting stayed with him. He was drawn back to the Quakers and came to know the elder who had spoken (Roger Brooke) and his family. He was surprised and delighted to find that out of meeting they were not sanctimonious, that the ladies had both beauty and wit which their plain clothes seemed to set off, and that the whole household was well read and eager for good conversation. One of the granddaughters teased "Uncle Roger" about having altered a scripture text in the meeting. "In the simplicity of my heart I said what came to me," the elderly man replied; then added, "Perhaps it was the New Testament writer who did not get the words quite right." To his astonishment Conway found he was not shocked.

Casually Roger Brooke asked the young preacher what he thought of the farmlands in the Quaker settlement. To Conway they were obviously superior to other farms in the area. "How does thee explain this?" pursued the Quaker. Conway, at a loss, suggested that perhaps it might be due to the length of time their farms had been under cultivation. The old man let him think for a moment, then asked, "Has it ever occurred to thee that it may be because of our paying wages to all who work for us?"⁵ Conway of course knew the arguments of the Abolitionists against the system of slavery, but this simple economic challenge had never occurred to him. Brooke did not press him, but there were still other seeds to be planted at Sandy Spring.

There was a school for young ladies—Fairhill—which he now visited. “The lovely girls in their tidy Quaker dresses, their sweet voices and manners, the elegance and order everywhere . . . filled me with wonder.” As a courtesy, the Principal gave him the opportunity to speak to the pupils. Now what should he do? Should he not try to save these sweet sinners from the flames of hell? Apparently they knew nothing of the Trinity, the blood atonement, and their own innate corruption. He could not bring himself to say the words.

How had these lovely maidens and the young men been trained to every virtue, to domestic affections and happiness? I never discussed theology with them; but their lives, their beautiful spirit, their homes, did away with my moral fears, and as the dogma paled, creedless freedom began to flush with warm life. These good and sweet women, who said no word against my dogmas, unconsciously to themselves or me, charmed me away from the dogmatic habitat.⁶

Obviously Moncure Conway was not long for Methodism. The “imperceptible arrows” had pierced his old creeds. What he was to call his “Earthward Pilgrimage” had begun. At that moment the Quakers, perhaps, could have had him. Wisely Roger Brooke advised him against joining the Society of Friends. He sensed in Conway a man of music and art and culture who would eventually feel confined by these rural Friends. Conway belonged in the larger urban world.

In later years he pondered over the words of Jesus, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” and concluded that for all earnest seekers, it is always God who forsakes them, not vice versa. First the God of Creeds, then the God of Guilt and Depravity, of Hell and Human Sacrifice—and all these separations are made with pain.

Two years later he emerged from Harvard Theological School a Unitarian and, to the despair of family and friends, an Abolitionist. In the meantime he had met Emerson, on whom he continued to lean heavily. In Emerson’s library he had found the books of the East, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Gulistan*, and the *Desatir*. He had also met the Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, and tramped around Walden Pond with Thoreau. It was his

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first taste of hobnobbing with the great. He continued to take a Boswellian pleasure in such associations and, by the end of his life, there was probably no one who was on friendly terms with so many eminent persons on both sides of the Atlantic.

He began his Unitarian ministry with a large and wealthy congregation in Washington, D.C. But when an epidemic of yellow fever ravaged some Virginia cities near by, the Common Council of Washington appointed a day of prayer for ministers to "offer petitions to Almighty God in behalf of those He has seen fit to visit sorely, and that He will be pleased to avert us from such terrible calamity". Conway refused to join. He could no longer acknowledge a God who would inflict suffering, nor a Church which would blame God for the misery of human ignorance. Such stands, and his Abolitionist views, lost him the Washington charge.

In Cincinnati he did not fare much better. The handsomely bearded, Christ-like young visage and the clear casual speech must merely have increased the horror in orthodox hearts when they heard him defend scepticism, Eastern mysticism, Darwin, and the theatre; and attack scriptural infallibility, the miracles, and the doctrine of depravity. He had not yet acquired the tolerance and diplomacy for which he came to be known in London. In 1859 the Cincinnati Church split in two.

In 1860 he returned to New England, leaving his Ohio charge and his editorship of a short-lived magazine, the Cincinnati *Dial*, to edit, briefly, an Abolitionist paper, *The Boston Commonwealth*. Relentlessly events moved on towards the war between the States. Conway's brothers were serving in the Confederate Army. His own Virginia home at Falmouth was occupied by Federal troops. Word came that his father's slaves—fifty or sixty of them—had made their way to Washington. Conway in a most unusual manoeuvre, met them there, led them personally to Baltimore (where pro-slavery sentiment still ran high) and got them entrained for Yellow Springs, Ohio, where he arranged for their permanent settlement.

Conway had continually advocated the immediate emancipation of the slaves as a means of averting the war. He was bitter

in his criticism of Lincoln's administration for its hesitancy on this point. Emboldened by the success of his own adventure in liberation, he now determined on a daring mission which he actually thought might end the war. It is not clear to what extent he was representing other Abolitionists in this scheme. In any case it drew him to England.

His handling of the "Mason Affair" was something less than politic, and may have provided his final chastening. J. M. Mason was the Confederate envoy to England, and shortly after Conway arrived in the British capital he wrote him "on behalf of the leading anti-slavery men of America" suggesting that if the South would emancipate the slaves the North would withdraw from the war and permit secession. The suggestion itself may not now appear as preposterous as it once did, but certainly Conway did not carry with him enough authority to make such a proposal. Furthermore by this time both North and South were committed to the bitter struggle. Conway suffered vilification from both sides, and his embarrassment was acute.

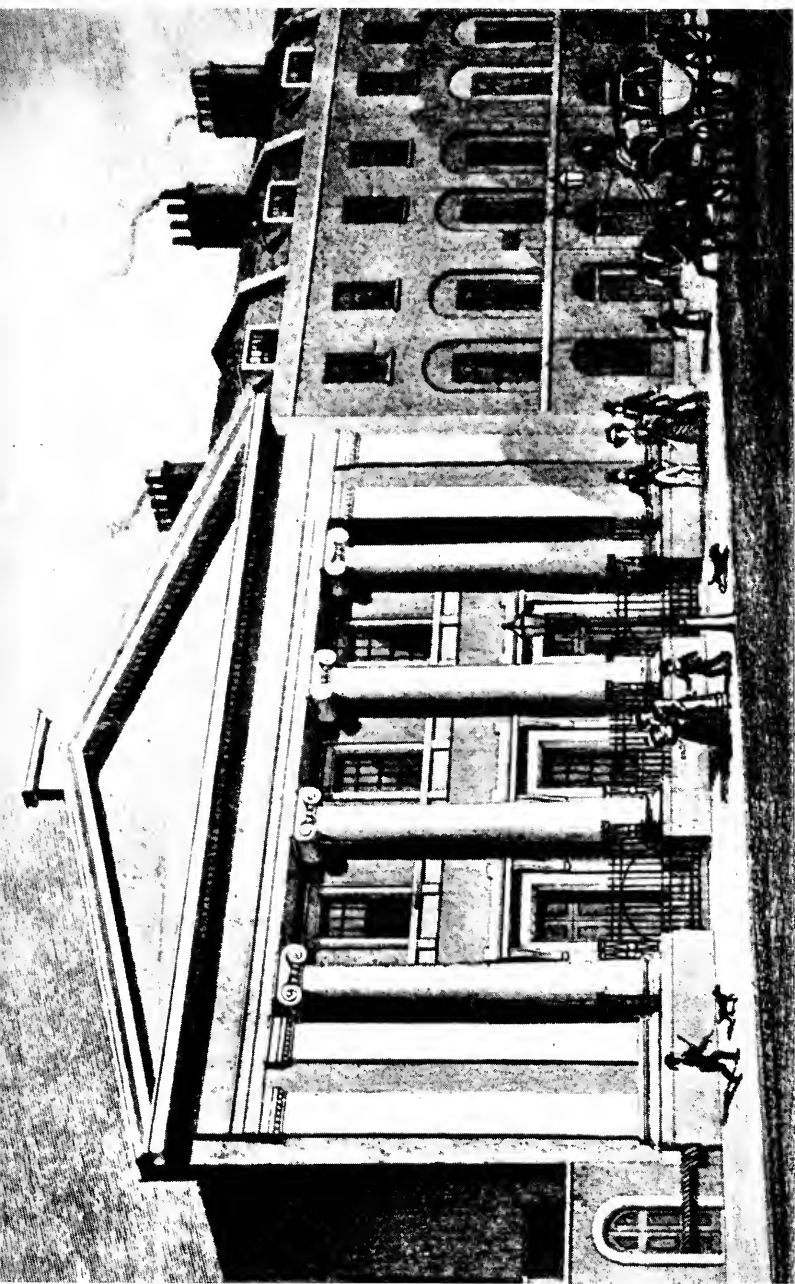
Possibly the embarrassment made the offer to stay in England more attractive. In any event he came to the South Place Committee with the foibles of his youth far removed in space, and with a personality well tempered in the uncertainties and disappointments of the idealist-reformer. His family joined him there in 1863. His salary was a mere 150 pounds per year and it remained at that figure for eight years.⁷ He was not, however, without other resources. His supplemental income increased handsomely over the years. His transatlantic connections made him a valuable publisher's agent. He was Mark Twain's English representative, compiler of a widely used *Spiritual Anthology*, and indefatigable contributor to magazines on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition, the list of his own works grew steadily and sold well, though not spectacularly.

All this was fortunate, for Conway enjoyed pleasant bourgeois living quite as much as his predecessor, Fox. He came to move easily in artistic circles—in the home of Edward Dannreuther, the composer, where William Morris's wallpaper formed the background for Burne-Jones's pictures. Here were William Morris himself, and Dante Rossetti, and, on occasion, George Eliot, and a visiting Richard Wagner. In time he himself owned

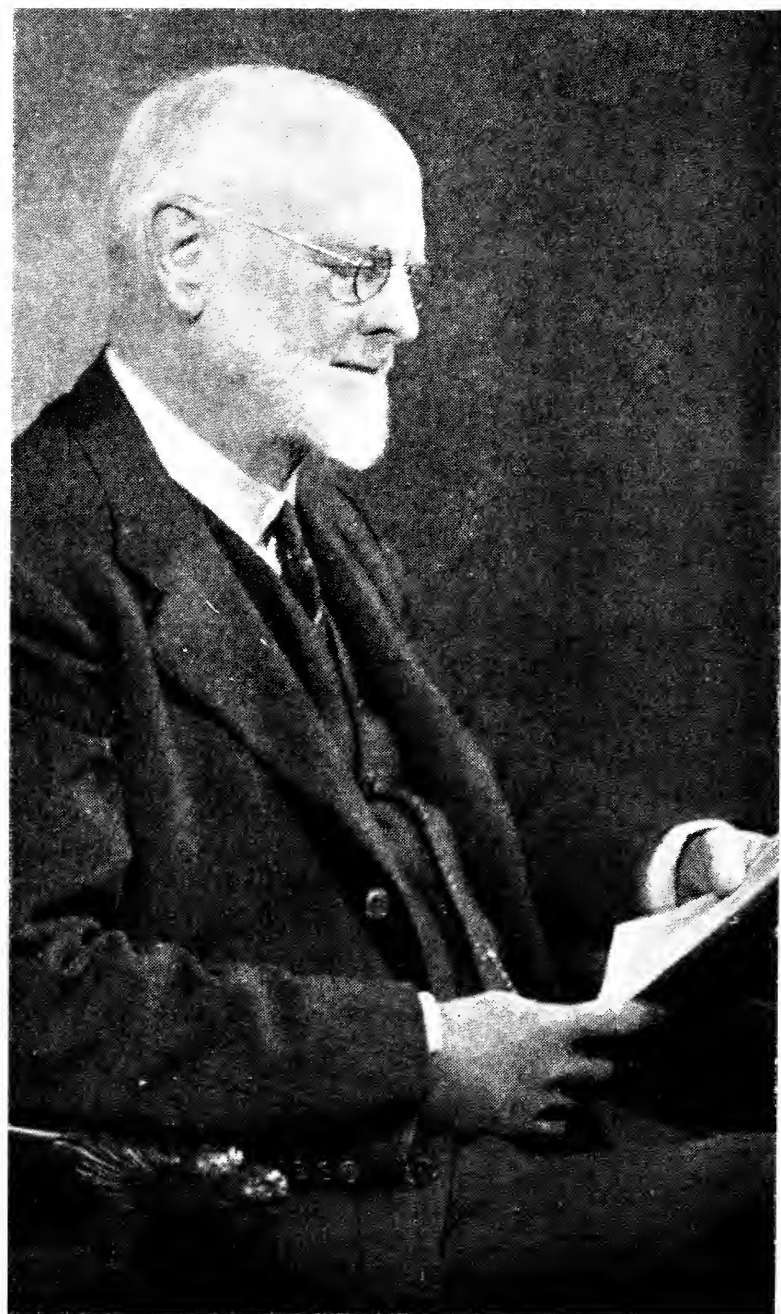




Monsieur D. Conway



South Place Chapel



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several Turners and Rossettis and a collection of first editions. Twice during his first London ministry he changed to larger and handsomer residences, the second time to a new development in Bedford Park. On this occasion an unknown rhymester penned a little poem for *St. James's Gazette* reporting an imaginary conversation between the owner of the development (J. T. Carr), and his architect (Norman Shaw):

"A church likewise," J. T. replies.
Says Shaw, "I'll build a church;
Yet sore I fear the aesthetes here
Will leave it in the lurch."

"Religion," pious Carr rejoined,
"In Moncure Conway's view
Is not devoid of interest,
Although it be not true."

"Then let us build a house for her,
Wherein she may abide;
And those who choose may visit her
The rest may stay outside."

"But lest the latter should repine,
A tennis ground we'll make,
Where they on Sunday afternoons
May recreation take."⁸

Conway calmly noted that the tennis went on during Sunday mornings too.

Ratcliffe reports that the committee which administered South Place had some fears that the congregation might not take to this stranger from across the Atlantic, and he was first hired for a six-month trial period. But he was received most cordially, and it was apparent almost from the first that the appointment was a permanent one. Prospects for the Chapel improved at once. A single donation cleared the Chapel debt. New crowds and new interest came to Finsbury.⁹

To the list of the famous associations he now added Browning, Dickens, Carlyle, James Anthony Froude, and George Meredith.

He liked and respected William Morris, but could not understand how this cultivated man could take his stand in Hyde Park addressing crude audiences. He had great admiration for the scientists of the era—Huxley, Tyndall, Lyell—and made an especial friend of W. K. Clifford. He even visited Darwin and was kindly received—which, he felt, was only right “because I was minister of the chief rationalistic congregation and was endeavouring to transfer the religious sentiment from a supernatural to a scientific basis. . . . My pilgrimage from Darwin’s door steadily carried me past the Giant Despair—a dynamic deity and creator responsible for the wrongs and agonies of nature.”¹⁰ Conway’s reputation for excellence in biographical and memorial addresses owed much to his personal relationships.

(Sometimes the friendships are turned to good account. He dines with W. G. Rossetti, and arranges his publication with Harper’s. Offhandedly, in the same letter to Harper’s, he acknowledges receipt of over 300 pounds.¹¹ In the meantime his stipend from South Place has risen to 500 pounds.) At the same time he was generous with his time and efforts. He wrote articles for struggling liberal editors who obviously could not afford to pay—for Annie Besant, for instance, who continued to rely on him as long as she remained in London.¹² Indeed the career of journalism frequently pushed hard for rivalry with his South Place duties. He wrote thirty articles for *Fraser’s* under Froude’s editorship. He was Harper’s special correspondent at the Paris Exposition in 1867. In 1870 he reported on the Franco-Prussian War “at the French front” for the *Daily News* and *New York World*. The South Place Committee must have been very liberal about such activities which involved absence from his post. They granted him a leave in 1875 for an extended tour of his homeland. But he remained faithful, turning down offers to succeed Theodore Parker in Boston, and to edit Cassells’ halfpenny paper, the *Echo*.

South Place remained the centre of his life. He was content with the position ION had given him in the cartoon—in his picket tent on the extreme left, associated with the texts: “We have no continuing city; let us go forth without the camp,” and “He dwells at large.” Unlike many of his radical contemporaries he neither sought nor achieved martyrdom.

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My isolated position as a minister, despite the asperities of a few Unitarians, was no martyrdom personally, and as a public teacher it gave me advantages. I looked on all the camps as equally struggling with error, and could weigh without bias the value of each for human happiness. For as the vision of a heaven faded, the importance of the happiness of this world became paramount. I could idealize any idol not worshipped by human sacrifices.¹³

Later he facetiously looked back on South Place as having the largest congregation in London since "every thinking man ought to count for at least a dozen who attend churches or chapels as a mere custom or fashion". His aim there was always to make a home of welcome for searching people. In the days when he was giving evening discourses at the Athenaeum in Camden Town—as a kind of branch of South Place—some of the local clergy objected to the licensing of the hall by Freethinkers. The magistrate asked some witnesses who they were and what they believed, and was answered, "They are seekers after truth, and a deuced long time finding it." The solid old magistrate seemed to think there was something English in that, and continued the licence.¹⁴

When the *Positivist Review* saluted South Place on its centenary (1893) it remarked upon the Chapel's uniqueness in having passed from Presbyterianism through Unitarianism to "the uttermost ends of Agnosticism".¹⁵ It was Conway who brought it to these "uttermost ends". He dropped formal prayer and read from devotional passages of the world's literature. In 1873 he published his eclectic scriptures as *The Sacred Anthology*.

Mr. Conway read from the Old Testament, Apocrypha, and Hindu scriptures, delivered a monologue instead of a prayer, and read an essay on the poet William Blake and mysticism.¹⁶

This was Wendte's report in 1874. "A peculiar kind of exercise which was neither quite a prayer nor altogether a meditation," was Davies's response to the new prayer-substitute which Conway began, with the Committee's sanction, in 1869. Davies was able to contrast Conway's chapel with Fox's. The older pews had been replaced with more comfortable ones. The

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pulpit was gone. In its place was a rostrum of red mahogany on a larger platform ("somewhat suggestive of a grocer's counter," Davies thought); behind the rostrum six cane-bottomed chairs; a grand piano covered with green baize. The service was simple: two hymns followed by an anthem from an excellent choir that "would have done credit to any ritualistic church in London". A reading from Conway's *Anthology*. An oration on J. A. Froude's *The Nemesis of Faith* from which Conway read at some length.

The essence of the "oration" which Davies heard was typical. As religions become institutions, they decay. The mean and selfish marshal themselves under the successful banner, and the embrace is fatal. In this manner every true religion has become paganized.¹⁷

I believe that the life or death of the present liberal organizations will depend on their ability to surrender that last ideal—that Christian name to which they have no honest right, and which represents a lowering of the whole aim which gave us life, and by which we must stand or fall.

It was not only the Sunday services that made South Place the cynosure of the religious rebellion. It buzzed with social activity and outside ideas. There were tableaux and theatricals. Richard Mansfield in his youth managed performances there. Shaw's "liberated mother", Mrs. Clandon, in *You Never Can Tell* (probably a tongue-in-cheek portrait of Annie Besant) exclaims, "I haven't danced since the soir  e at South Place twenty years ago." That would have been, of course, at the height of Conway's ministry there. Conway opened his pulpit (his "desk" he insisted on calling it) to all sorts, compassing the complete spectrum of Positivism and Secularism. He was host to the National Sunday League where non-churchgoers could hear an improving lecture and some serious music.

In the meantime, as we have noted, his own ministry spread to the Athenaeum and to Cleveland Hall. One of his purposes in such outreach was to bring his message closer to the working men as opposed to the more bourgeois clientele at South Place. His audiences at all places were large, but from all accounts they were not working men. Conway often walked through the depressed areas of London. He had seen public executions. He

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was genuinely concerned about poverty and reform. But he had not the common touch of Bradlaugh or of the Christian Socialist, Stewart Headlam. A touch of class consciousness of the Old South clung to him. He was not a Socialist nor even an egalitarian democrat. He would not dream of trusting government to the proletariat.

It was the common dream of most of the heretical groups that there should somehow emerge a fellowship of liberal thinkers, a communion of mankind, above all sects and superstitions, devoted to progress and moral welfare. If anyone was equipped to lay the cornerstone of such an edifice it was Moncure Conway. On 13 and 14 June 1878 he and W. K. Clifford brought together a Congress of Liberal Thinkers at South Place. It was the most inclusive group of its kind ever assembled. Huxley and Tyndall, with Clifford, represented science. Delegates from various sects and cults arrived from overseas. Speakers included Charles Voysey, G. J. Holyoake, and Conway himself. The aim, in the ponderous jargon of the Congress, was:

The scientific study of religious phenomena; the collection and diffusion of information concerning religious developments throughout the world; the emancipation of mankind from the spirit of superstition; fellowship among liberal thinkers of all classes; the promotion of culture, progress, and moral welfare of mankind; and of whatever in any form of religion may tend towards that end.¹⁸

But alas, even on such pious generalities the conference had difficulties in agreeing. The last phrase, for example, was a compromise for the words, "pure and universal religion", and took an hour and a half to evolve. The atheists, as well as the liberal religionists, had to be satisfied. Harriet Law, nevertheless, thought that it was the beginning of an association into which followers of all faiths could enter with a free mind in an effective union.¹⁹

The Society dissolved in less than a year. Conway laid the failure to the untimely death of Clifford at the age of thirty-four. Others regarded Clifford as an unfortunate choice in the first place. Though he was an acknowledged mathematical prodigy, he had neither the trust nor the goodwill of the scientific establishment.

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From the beginning of his tenure it was apparent that Conway would lead the South Place congregation far beyond formal Unitarianism. Whatever belief in a benevolent God remained to him when he first arrived in England was shattered a year later when, in August 1864, his younger son Emerson died. Anyone who has combed through nineteenth-century letters must be dolefully impressed by the frequency with which death stalked the young in those days. Yet family life outside the worst of the slum areas was closely knit, and recurrence did not make bereavement easier to bear. With their surviving son, the Conways fled for a time to the Continent, where, at Ostend, Moncure seems to have undergone some sort of mystical experience. It was not the sort of experience that drew him back to "the fold". Rather it left him facing outward as the fictional vision of Robert Elsmere was to do twenty-five years later.

He could no longer with honesty claim the name "Christian". In his essay on *Christianity* (1876) he considered Christ a purely human figure, and recommended the abandonment of Christianity in favour of a higher view.

To two great ideas, both fatal to a priesthood, Christ fell a martyr. He was not put to death because of his beautiful moral teachings or his pure life. . . . His precepts can all be found in Talmudic and other scriptures existing before his time. . . . His fatal peculiarities were first, that he taught a natural religion, a religion written in flowers on the earth, or with the stars in their courses. He taught men to judge themselves what was right. Such ideas rendered a priesthood totally unnecessary. . . . Do not go to churches to pray, but to your closet! Put no trust in tithes! . . . Jesus might perhaps have escaped death, for his eloquence and sincerity had won him a popularity which no priest possessed. But he turned the people against him when he added to it that other fatal idea—namely that all their hopes of a national political Messiah and military deliverer were in vain, and their proud temple was to be overthrown, and their future glory to be found in fraternizing with other nations, not in conquering them. That was more than they could stand.²⁰

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Conway suspected the pattern of Jesus's life to be that of the Essene sects, and he dated the origin of Christianity as a movement to the Nicene councils. He found the Middle Ages "preponderantly evil", and saw the decline of Christianity inherent in the doctrines of the fall of man, the vicarious atonement, the deification of Jesus, the spread of the gospel, the lure of heaven and the threat of hell. As for "liberal Christianity", it was a mistake. "The Unitarians of England and America have done their utmost to make Christianity consistent with truth and freedom, but they have shown that it is impossible." In religion, he came to believe, it was better to start afresh:

We are a civilized country in everything but one, that is religion. In that we are barbarous. . . . Some of us believe—I believe—that eyes turned from phantom gods have caught glimpses of a divine life in the evolution of nature, and the mystical movement in the heart of man.²¹

Conway's view of evolution as mystical and somehow beneficent is antecedent to the early twentieth-century Life Force of Henri Bergson and Bernard Shaw. *Christianity* is an especially interesting parallel to Shaw's Preface to *Androcles and the Lion* thirty-six years later. Conway correctly assessed Darwinism as a revolution that would change the nature of human thought, but he had neither the toughness nor the realism of Bergson's later creative evolution. Like Winwood Reade, he was overly lyrical about the "music of the universe" and overhopeful in envisioning "the phantoms of religious terror cleared away" and the new science rising as the "star in the East".

If Conway had been willing and able to abandon some of his many other "professions", he might have been an original and creative scholar to rival Ernest Renan, whom he knew and admired. Late in his life, when he had shed some of his other activities, he produced a study of *Solomon and Solomonite Literature* (1899). In this he carefully separated the two incompatible strains of the Bible—the "Jahvism" and the "Solomonism"—the chastening God who was forever testing his children with war, disease, earthquake, and famine; and the wise, loving God existing often side-by-side through the Old Testament, the Apocrypha, the Epistles and the Gospels. The Solomonite search

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turns out in the end to be humanistic. The human heart has not really found any tenderness in the Universe, any fairness, any humanity, except in its own reflection.

What set Conway off from the tumultuous Secularist movement was not so much the nature of his beliefs as his style and tone. He was at least as close to atheism as Holyoake and as remorseless in his criticism of the Bible as Bradlaugh, but he never ceased to be in a very real sense a minister to his South Place flock. He had the gift (again like Renan) of making heresies sound scriptural and even respectable. He concluded his Solomonic study:

Solomon passes, Jesus passes, but the Wisdom they loved as Bride, as Mother, abides, however veiled in fables. She is still inspiring the unfinished work of creation, and her delight is with the children of men.²²

A student of Eastern religions since his Emersonian days, Conway in 1883 determined to spend some time in the Orient and to use his later years in study and scholarship. He arranged with the Committee to take a year's leave in Far-Eastern travel as prelude to retirement. He was barely past his fiftieth year. The record of *My Pilgrimage to the Wise Men of the East* did not appear until the last year of his life (New York, 1906). It is charming as a travelogue and as memoirs, but adds little that is not anecdotal to his earlier studies. Back at South Place in the spring of 1884 he summed up his ministry and by the summer of 1885 prepared to leave permanently.

Once again we see the departure of a strong leader without a successor in sight. The committee system at South Place, however, was some insurance against immediate collapse. Various well-known Secularists and humanists were invited to fill Conway's vacant "desk" for trial periods. Ratcliffe mentions Andrew Wilson, Graham Wallas, G. J. Romanes, Karl Pearson, Edward Carpenter, J. M. Robertson, and James Allanson Picton.

On 3 December 1885 Annie Besant wrote to Mrs. Conway in New York:

He is dreadfully missed at South Place, and I do not see much likelihood of any thoroughly satisfactory successor. The fact

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is that many of the older and more orthodox there could put up with his heresy, because they had grown into it, but they shrink from anyone as advanced and less familiar; while the more heretical ones don't approve of the theistic leanings which suit the first class. Dr. Wilson is too dry for one set, and the more emotional preachers are too pious for another. Mr. Pearson has been spoken of a good deal, but nothing seems to get settled.²³

Finally in 1887, Conway, from New York, suggested the possibility of Stanton Coit, another American and a disciple of Dr. Felix Adler, head of the American Ethical movement. Coit's brief tenure was at first encouraging. At his instance the name of the organization was changed to South Place Ethical Society, and some of the excitement Conway had brought to the Chapel seemed to return. But Coit could not work as amicably with the Committee. He withdrew the "meditative exercise" which only Conway, apparently, could deliver without embarrassment. The traditions and personalities developed under his predecessor did not suit the masterful personality of Coit. He made a friendly withdrawal in 1891, and remained a prominent leader of the Ethical movement in London.

The year after Conway had left London and resettled in Brooklyn, he was again shaken by the loss of a promising son, Dana, born the year after the death of Emerson Conway and thus twenty-one years of age. There remained a grown son and daughter, Eustace and Mildred. Away from the solace of his London friends, he sank himself into his work, completing his two-volume *Life of Paine* (1892), on which, along with the four-volume edition of Paine's work (1893-96), his literary reputation largely rests. America accepted him warmly, but almost as a "foreign" dignitary. He had ample opportunity to travel, lecture, and write. He even attempted, unsuccessfully, some novels. When South Place asked him to come back he had already made a return visit to England, and accepted the offer with gratitude.

In the interim of seven years things had changed, and Conway was too much the philosopher to expect that the old life would be waiting for him in 1892. For the pleasant home in Bedford Park,

he took a flat in Bloomsbury. Some of the problems he had once solved, principally financial ones, had to be solved again. There is no evidence that his power in the pulpit or his popularity had declined; but he was now in his sixties and could not be the vigorous Londoner he once had been. It was, however, not his own health, but that of his wife, Ellen, that forced his second resignation in 1897. Once more he took her back to New York, where, within six months, she died. His surviving children had settled into their own lives. He had a decade of life yet to face alone.

It was now obvious that the nature of South Place would have to change. Moncure Conway was the last of its formal ministers. The Ethical movement tended to decentralize and to unite with remnants of the Secularists and Positivists. South Place's list of appointed lecturers, for instance, included for many years John MacKinnon Robertson, M.P., who had helped to carry on *The National Reformer* with Bradlaugh's surviving daughter. It also included Herbert Burrows, former partner of Annie Besant in the celebrated strike of the matchgirls against Bryant & May, and loyal Theosophist. Other frequently recurring names were John Atkinson Hobson, Cecil Delisle Burns, and Joseph McCabe. At the end of the century South Place became a centre for pro-Boer and anti-imperialist activity. The list of speakers from Conway's retirement to the outbreak of World War I includes many of the best-known names of the times.²⁴

The building itself deteriorated, and the site was sold in 1927. In 1929 the Society moved to its new home, appropriately named Conway Hall, in Red Lion Square, Holborn.

Conway, in the last ten years of his life, moved restlessly back and forth among New York, London, and Paris. He could not be wholly inactive. He was naturally disturbed, as all intellectuals and humanitarians were, at the South African violence. He was past making any such personal intervention as he had done in his youth. Instead he devised a scheme for averting war by calling a Commission to sit in judgment on disputes if one of the countries involved refused to submit to the Hague Tribunal. He felt that the moral pressure of such a fact-finding and quasi-judicial body would help keep war in check.²⁵ Considering that the year was 1900 the plan was an advanced concept of internationalism.

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The charm and rich good humour of his later writing nearly disguise the loneliness and sense of exile from which he suffered. But when he was ushering Frederic Harrison about in New York in 1901, the vigorous old Positivist wrote back to his wife:

Moncure Conway is aged—looks eighty-five, and is younger than I—spoke of my youthful looks. “Yes!” he said, “You have a wife—and such a wife—that is what keeps you young—that lovely woman,” he said out loud for all the table. “Yes!” I said, “that’s it.” And I know it’s true.²⁶

It was not only the loss of his wife from which he was suffering. The new century, which had symbolized so much of hope to the late Victorians, showed little prospect of fulfilling their ideals. He did not want to inflict his depressed state of mind on his beloved South Place, yet he wrote to one of his old congregation from New York,

Things in this country are so unmitigatedly atrocious, mean, and cruel—and daily getting worse—that perhaps I [am] unable to see the hopeful side in England. I can see no great brains or hearts in public life anymore there than here,—(nor anywhere except in France).²⁷

And he had been forced to report from London,

Jingoism has invaded even South Place and possibly the Omar Khayyam Club. O my lost countries!²⁸

To the end, however, he kept contact with South Place; and the congregation, many of whom continued to feel orphaned, never ceased to rely on him for counsel. One of the most revealing insights into Conway’s mind in these latter days comes by way of a request by Mrs. Fletcher-Smith concerning the redecoration of South Place Chapel. Conway had chosen, in the old days, names to be inscribed around the inside walls. In addition, on the wall behind the platform were the words: TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE. All this had, at one point, been painted out, and Mrs. Fletcher-Smith now wanted Conway’s views on restoring the names. The old names, she had determined, were, at the front: FOX, SOCRATES, JESUS, SHAKESPEARE, CHANNING; at audience’s right: BUDDHA, GOETHE, VOLTAIRE, LUTHER, PAINE, PARKER; at the rear: MANU, PLATO, SAADI, ZOROASTER, MOSES; and

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at the left: CONFUCIUS, MOHAMMED, SPINOZA, BRUNO, and BACON. Should these now be re-established? Or should changes be made?

Conway replied from Paris:

As to the list of names you send, I am gratified to think that the Chapel is inclined to return to such characteristic decoration. When I prepared the original list of honoured names I followed what light I had, but I have since gained some new light and I do not think it quite right to assign a place to Moses. Probably he was not guilty of the atrocities and inhumanities associated with him in the Bible,—but there they are, and we cannot expect the congregations to critically separate him from them.

As to the names that ought to be on each side of Jesus I have thought carefully.

During my wife's illness in London, before the fatal sentence was pronounced by the medical men which paralyzed my pen, I wrote (nearly a year) a careful study of Solomon. . . . The book will prove that . . . it was he who initiated the secular ethics, the high idea of women, and the ideas of intellectual freedom, from which Jesus and his forerunners drew their inspiration, and that the best thoughts and parables of Jesus are amplifications of Solomon's proverbs,—and that Jesus so declared. I further prove that both Solomon and Jesus were fundamentally Zoroastrians, as opposed to the hard sacrificial dogmas and rites now known as Judaism, or Puritanism. Consequently my belief is that Jesus ought to have on his right the name of Solomon, on his left the name of Zoroaster. When my researches are read I feel sure that this will be approved.

I think that Emerson ought to be substituted for the name of Parker. Parker was Emerson's creation. By Fox I assume W. J. Fox is meant, and he ought to have a place in the Chapel he founded; but the founder of Quakerism, George Fox, the greatest religious genius England ever produced, ought to be honoured.

I think therefore that the names might well be: JESUS, SOLOMON, ZOROASTER, SOCRATES, BUDDHA, CONFUCIUS, SOLON OR PLATO. MOHAMMED, OMAR KHAYYAM, SHAKESPEARE, SPINOZA,

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BACON, BRUNO OR SERVETUS, GEORGE FOX, VOLTAIRE, PAINE, GOETHE, EMERSON, CHANNING, W. J. FOX.

I doubt if Manu is a good name, for nothing clear of his or about him survives. Omar Khayyam should I think be substituted for Saadi. It might be put to note whether Solon (who said "Know thyself") or Plato should go in if there is not room for both: both are noble names. I doubt a little about Bacon, whose moral character was not high (as I judge), but his genius and service to philosophy were *Great*. I think Gibbon preferable to Bacon as a South Place name.

If there should remain space, Comte and J. S. Mill ought to be thought of. I am not sure than Renan would not be preferable to Channing (or Strauss perhaps).

Mohammed I do not quite like as he was a military leader, and would prefer Akbar, the emperor who made such a noble effort to give equality and freedom to all religions. He initiated the earliest "Parliament of Religions". In India his name is a proverb of toleration and liberalism. I think Servetus more suitable than Bruno because S. was a martyr of truth under Protestantism, more important to us than Romanism.

[Written alongside in the margin:] I don't think that Luther, who was the founder of a sectarian state church, and was intolerant, is quite our man.

Such are my views and feelings at present, but I do not wish to be doctrinaire about them, and do not wish to be quoted with an insistence against others. I feel strongly about Solomon, and think I have quite rehabilitated his character with regard to what is said about his multitudinous wives and concubines.²⁹

Moncure Conway's restless wanderings and probings came to an end in Paris on 15 November 1907. The most gregarious and the most civilized of the Freethought reformers died in loneliness. He was a unique figure, fitting none of the stereotypes of his own era or of ours. He missed greatness, but we must remember that he moved among giants. His own contributions to the literature of rationalism are, in my own opinion, greatly underrated. They are, nevertheless, except for his study of Paine, no longer read—are often, indeed, hard to find. If his

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influence somehow persists in the world of today it must have transmitted itself through those who once made up his congregation at South Place.

When Stanton Coit first came to London to replace Conway at South Place in 1887, he was already committed to the Ethical Culture principles of Felix Adler. He had given up his post as a teacher of English Literature at Amherst College to study political science at Columbia University and to join an audience of 2,000 each Sunday to listen to Adler. After a year's apprenticeship, he left for Germany to study philosophy, just as Adler himself had done a decade before.

Adler had returned to America in 1876 to renounce Judaism and to form a new movement based on the idea of a moral community—the New York Society for Ethical Culture. Coit returned in 1885, after three years of philosophy in Berlin and an interval of some months at Toynbee Hall, London, fired with the idea of the University Settlement. In his hands, however, the settlements turned out quite different from Toynbee Hall. In the New York slums he called them Neighbourhood Guilds, and he retained this name for them after he returned to England. A Neighbourhood Guild in Kentish Town, London, developed within two and a half years to include five clubs, a circulating library, Sunday afternoon concerts, Sunday evening lectures, Saturday evening dances, a choral society, and between fifteen and twenty classes in technical and literary subjects. Coit's emphasis in these ventures was on an organic and democratic operation that would run on its own power.

Coit was just thirty years old when he began his London career at South Place. He had come out of Welsh descent from Columbus, Ohio, from a family of eight children, only three of whom lived to maturity. He brought with him influences of a Freethinking mother, a background of spiritualism (which he abandoned when he was nineteen) and a head full of Ralph Waldo Emerson. In addition (according to H. J. Blackham) Coit was heavily influenced by Sir John Seeley, Professor of Modern History at Cambridge. Seeley rejected Christianity, but insisted that religion had always been the basis of societies.³⁰

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It was this line of thought that led Coit through the ambiguities of the Ethical movement to regard his own principal effort as a *church*. This set him apart from some of the other branches of the Ethical movement, though Blackham claims that

. . . the Ethical movement was from the first a religious movement, by operational definition: It did the work of religion with responsible confidence, with most scrupulous care to meet with tested and reliable teaching the real problems and needs of men and women.³¹

Still the original statement of principles of the London Ethical Society said merely:

The moral and religious life of Man is capable of a rational justification and explanation apart from Authority and tradition.³²

And although the word "religious" occasionally slips into the early reports of the Society, it is clear that the original London group was principally Humanist.

The first British Ethical Society emerged early in 1886 after Coit first came to live at Toynbee Hall. Many of the original members were from an existing organization, The Fellowship of the New Life, which will be dealt with in its own right in the following pages. William Clarke, Percival Chubb, and J. R. MacDonald were among those who maintained some sense of continuity as the efforts of the more pretentious Fellowship declined and the Ethical movement began to take hold in Britain. Its beginnings, however, were hardly more promising than the Fellowship's. The pioneer Society lasted only till 1897, and membership, which began at forty, never rose beyond 137.

But Coit was not content with a single Society. He helped found the East London Ethical Society and Sunday School, Mile End (1890), which later changed its name to Hackney Ethical Society and survived until 1912. From 1891 to 1914 he remained an organizing lecturer for the West London Ethical Society and drew large audiences at Prince's Hall, Piccadilly and in the Town Hall, Kensington. A South London Society lasted from 1892 into the 1920s, and a St. Pancras branch from 1895 to 1911.

The most unique and most successful contribution of Stanton Coit to the London scene was his Ethical Church, Bayswater,

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which developed from the West London Society in 1909. Coit preached a socialized religion rather than a religious socialism. Unlike Conway, who had a strong touch of personal mysticism in his nature, Coit felt that the basis of religion was in the social order. He detailed these ideas in *National Idealism and a State Church* (1907) and *National Idealism and The Book of Common Prayer* (1908).

Coit did not regard his Church at Bayswater as in any sense a rival sect. He thought of it as a model for Anglican reform. He was nurturing a movement that might be a sort of "Unacknowledged party within the Anglican Church, striving . . . to bring it to a new conception of its national task."³³ The non-Coit Ethicists felt he was merely "playing church".

They think that he was merely ritualizing an ethical society meeting because he had a liking for that sort of thing, that he was perhaps childish or nostalgic. They do not see that he was making a bid for national acceptance of the ethical-social interpretation of religion. . . .³⁴

The Establishment, of course, paid no attention. But the Bayswater Church itself became a centre for fine music, art, and drama. Mr. Blackham recalls that the small round church would be filled to capacity (some 500) and that Coit was "one of the most dramatic preachers in London". It was also a centre for progressive causes. Coit worked with the Fabians, and supported woman suffrage. (In 1899 he married a prominent suffragette and refugee from German militarism, Adela Wetzler.) He even went so far as to stand for Parliament, as the Labour candidate for Wakefield in 1906. Whether one should regard it as the Commons' loss or the Ethical movement's gain, he was, in any case, unsuccessful.

With the outbreak of World War I, the ambiguities inherent in all the heretical societies became more painful. The Ethical Societies, which had never been wholly clear in their attitude towards Christianity, did not escape internal dissension. Coit's church and the movement generally did survive the war, but their heyday was before 1914. Coit himself continued to maintain that the Church should not be disestablished, but democratized and ethicized. He continued to work for a Church that

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would rest on a democratic and naturalistic base, rather than on supernaturalism and a hierarchy.

There is a whimsical post-war epilogue. In the 1920s Coit once used his sermon to discourse on Shaw's play, *Saint Joan*. One of his congregation was sufficiently impressed to donate two hundred guineas for a stained-glass window. It was done by E. Liddell Armitage, and depicted Joan at the stake, surrounded by the Bishop of Beauvais, the English soldier who (in the play) offered her the cross, the repentant monk, and some figures of later times—Pope Benedict XV (under whom she was canonized), Anatole France, Bernard Shaw, and a Dr. Fulcher in whose memory the window was donated. The church had been a Primitive Methodist Chapel before 1909. In 1954 it was sold to the Roman Catholics. The window was carefully removed and presented to the Trinity College of Music through the good offices of the late Professor Kennedy Scott, who had been in charge of the music at the Ethical Church. It is an appropriate tribute to Coit's eloquence and a memento of the social and religious institution he created.

There were other more or less Freethinking congregations. Rev. Charles Voysey preached to his Theistic congregation from 1871 for nearly thirty years—a tenure longer than Conway's. Voysey's Church was founded on a *cause célèbre*, and therefore attracted most of its attention at the beginning.

Voysey was Vicar of Healaugh, Tadcaster, Yorkshire, when he came into conflict with the Anglican Church. In recounting the events shortly afterwards he confessed that he had never agreed with the Thirty-nine Articles although like others he had hypocritically signed them.³⁵ In those days, he said, nobody paid any attention to such things and there was consequently a kind of religious freedom that had since disappeared. Conway, by the way, defended him in this rationale. Since *Essays and Reviews* eminent churchmen had openly denied the authority of the Bible, man's depravity, the objective reality of miracles, and even the value of foreign missions. Young men accordingly felt free to enter the Church. It was not Voysey, Conway pointed out, who invented this climate of confusion and hypocrisy.³⁶

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Voysey had early voiced approval of *Essays and Reviews*, complaining only that it did not go far enough. Sermons and publications had brought him into conflict with his bishops, until finally two sermons, published as *The Sling and the Stone*, brought about his trial for heresy. The title of the offending pieces was adopted for four series—twenty-four sermons in each—and distributed by Thomas Scott for six shillings per series. Even then the Archbishop would gladly have continued to look the other way, except that he was prodded by lay groups, especially the Church Association, which raised money to finance the prosecution by distributing copies of the heretical sermons. The method was intended to shock readers into support of the Association's action, but Voysey contentedly observed that it won him some converts too.

The trial was in York Minster in 1869 and stirred such interest that for some days, according to Conway, the Vicar of Healaugh virtually edited the London papers "and turned *The Times* into a rationalistic tract". The Church was at a great disadvantage. It was easy enough to prove Voysey guilty on the basis of the evidence at hand, but what then was it to do with the entire Broad Church movement, many of whose leaders differed from Voysey only in degree? Voysey correctly assessed that it was the Establishment that was on trial. Lord Hatherly was forced to find him guilty on thirteen counts. The clear-cut judgment meant to the defendant that the Thirty-nine Articles would have to be abandoned or the Church disestablished. He kept the case alive by appealing to the Privy Council.

He was not a man of private means, and the threatened loss of his living was the more serious because he had a large family to support—a wife, eight children, and an aged mother. The costs of his defence were met by subscription. It was a popular cause. Sympathies were aroused from the Secularists on the one side to Benjamin Jowett, Master at Balliol College, Oxford, on the other. The Secularists were chagrined when they found in later years Voysey preaching against their hero's right to sit in Parliament.³⁷ Jowett's contribution was accompanied by his advice to Voysey to resign and drop the case.³⁸ Between the trial and the appeal, a member of his Defence Committee wrote to his solicitors, giving the same advice, and urging Voysey to

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accept a large enough sum of money to support his household for life. Voysey felt that this was simply protecting the Church in case the appeal might succeed, and so refused the offer.

The appeal, however, was denied. In 1871 he found himself without a Church and without security. But public interest had spread far beyond Yorkshire. Two residents of St. John's Wood, London, soon called on Voysey and offered him a guarantee of fifty pounds per year if he would come to London and open a Church of unspecified doctrine in their neighbourhood. Voysey, who had made it clear that he intended to go on preaching in any pulpit that would have him, agreed. At a meeting in St. George's Hall in July 1871, one hundred and sixty-three interested (or curious) persons—including Charles Darwin and Bishop Colenso—witnessed the launching of the first organized Theistic Church.³⁹

Two thousand people attended the first service there on 1 October, and hundreds were turned away. Of course, the Rev. Charles Davies was not long in investigating. The hall had the atmosphere of a theatre-lecture hall, but Voysey had tried to overcome this. The service was little changed from the Anglican in form. It had merely been rewritten to conform to a Theism that was not necessarily Christian. Voysey was much influenced by Francis W. Newman and read from him during the service. Davies found the new Theistic preacher most exciting when he was being most destructive. Yet his printed sermons reveal some sharp humour. From his battle with the Establishment he had emerged with not too great a burden of solemnity.

It will be remembered that Annie Besant fled to Voysey as the first stop on her flight from Orthodoxy. She retained his sympathies, but there was never the easy relationship she had with the Conways. When she turned to Theosophy Voysey simply regarded her as hypnotized.⁴⁰

After some years at St. George's Hall, the congregation moved to Langham Hall in Great Portland Street. In 1887 they moved once again to an old Huguenot Chapel in Swallow Street, Piccadilly, and this remained their home until 1912 when the lease expired and the building was demolished. This was the year also of Charles Voysey's death. But his Church went on under various leadership in New Bond Street.

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In his first volume of *Heterodox London* Davies reports on still another congregation, apparently of the early seventies, which met in "a kind of theatre building" at 14 Newman Street, near Oxford Street. The morning services were free, but in the evenings seats ranged from a shilling to threepence. A Dr. Perfitt ("hale, scholarly looking with a long white beard, wearing simple evening dress") spoke, at Davies's visit, on a letter of John Bright's. This society, too, considered itself religious, but not Christian, and was organized along democratic lines with paid membership, operating under a set of "objects" and "rules", modelled, perhaps, on South Place or on Voysey's experiment. Its name at the time was "The Society of Independent Religious Reformers", but it does not seem to have existed very long, at least under that title.

There is yet another sort of congregation that betrayed the deep need of rebelling Victorians and Edwardians to come together for some formality of worship, even when the idea of God had become nebulous or non-existent. This was the Labour Church as founded by John Trevor, who made the assumption that the Labour movement was in reality a religious movement, that the two great revolts against the Establishment—the social and religious—were essentially one revolt. It was, as we shall see, the same assumption that lay at the back of Christian Socialism, and the same assumption made by Bernard Shaw when he tried to tie the doctrine of the Life Force to that of social progress. (The workers in Andrew Undershaft's model garden city, in the third act of *Major Barbara*, attend a Labour Church named for William Morris.) The marriage of these concepts at the turn of the century had much to recommend it, and it is surprising that the Labour Church cut so small a swathe in London. Perhaps it arrived too late to compete with the more established heresies.

But by 1895 fourteen towns had congregations affiliated with the Labour Church Union, with memberships ranging from a hundred to three hundred. Unitarianism provided a way-station once again for John Trevor, whose sufferings under Calvinism as a child we have already quoted. In 1891 he left a Unitarian pulpit in Manchester to form the first Labour Church. Trevor

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admitted that he was influenced by the Salvation Army and envied their successful outreach to the working man, but of course he did not accept their fundamentalist theology.

Trevor's organ was the *Labour Prophet*. It asserted that the Labour movement derived its power to free men's spirits from the economic and moral laws of God. It supported the reform movements and rejected the respectability of the formal Churches.

The services were simple. Laughter was not forbidden—one gathers it may often have been encouraged. There was a hymnal, from which all mention of Jesus was deleted, although the name of God was occasionally permitted. Some form of prayer was retained. The tone of the movement was strongly anti-clerical, and it therefore suffered from the lack of leadership normally provided by a professional minister. The sermons, or addresses, were often delivered by outside speakers. Keir Hardie, Bernard Shaw, Katherine Conway Glazier, Robert Blatchford, Edward Carpenter, and Ramsay MacDonald were all familiar figures in Labour Church pulpits. Inglis notes that of all the famous speakers who preached, none ever became affiliated formally with Trevor's Church. They used it merely as a platform. In some places the Labour Church tended to become indistinguishable from a local branch of the Fabian Society or the Social Democratic Federation or the Independent Labour Party.

Trevor, in London in 1895, did his utmost to establish at least one centre in the mecca of heterodoxy, but finally despaired. By that time Londoners, if they were so inclined, had other choices. Trevor offered no radically different path, nor any dynamic personality around which one more new movement could rally. The Labour Church Union did not survive World War I.⁴¹

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For many Victorians the sense that the new and better order lay round the bend of the future was so certain that their arguments were reduced to the most appropriate ways of getting there.

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Should they give precedence to social reform, or should they begin with the perfection of their individual lives? Should progress be measured by morality or efficiency? By a renaissance of politics, or a rebirth of religion?

Clearly the Socialists had made their choice, and clearly it was a persuasive one. Even those who could not accept their goals found themselves agreeing that the elimination of poverty and a re-appraisal, at least, of the social and political system would have to be accomplished if men's souls were to be saved or their spirits set aglow. The general direction of the moral reformer and the social reformer did not appear to be markedly divergent. Still it was almost impossible to keep them harnessed in the same team. Should they give their immediate efforts to electing a reform candidate to the London School Board, or concentrate on some disciplinary exercises designed to strengthen character?

Nowhere are both the relationship and the cleavage between these inseparable concepts more apparent than among the high-minded group of men and women who met in Thomas Davidson's rooms in Chelsea in 1882 to mark the beginnings of the Fellowship of the New Life. Those who recall it at all know it only as the little band that gave birth to the Fabian Society. The Fabians have received, especially of late years, the attention accorded to success. It is time to look at what little is known of its forgotten parent-twin, and the remarkable man who brought it into existence.

Thomas Davidson was not a Londoner. He was a Scot, and thought of himself as "the wandering scholar". Before arriving in London he had already become a world traveller and had formed a similar organization in New York. He did not stay with the societies he founded, but, having sown the seed, moved on.

He was born in 1840 in Aberdeenshire, one of two sons of a poor but ambitious mother who insisted that her boys be educated. The family lived with a widowed grandmother in the village of Fetterangus. His upbringing was rural. His brother was John Morrison Davidson, a political and social journalist of some note. As a promising young scholar, Thomas was taken in by his master and taught Latin, French, Greek, and mathematics. He was awarded a scholarship at King's College, University of

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Aberdeen, and graduated in 1860. Some frustrated Aberdeen love affair seems to have set him wandering. He never married, and he only became somewhat settled in his later life in his colony in the New York Adirondacks. He held a series of brief teaching positions as he moved restlessly from Tunbridge Wells to Toronto, to St. Louis and Boston. Through Longfellow's friendship he became, for a time, an examiner at Harvard. He spent a year in Greece. In Rome he was introduced to the Pope, and conversed with him for an hour in the Vatican Gardens—in Latin. Before he arrived in London he spent a year in North Italy writing *The Philosophical System of Antonio Rosmini-Serbati*, a pantheistic monist whose views Davidson greatly admired. His publications are impressive not only in their number, but in their variety. In addition to his work on Rosmini, he was known among scholars for his essay on *The Parthenon Frieze*, and his *Prolegomena to Tennyson's "In Memoriam"*. He loved the atmosphere of the medieval universities of Europe, but would not stay at any of them. "You met him, talked with him, were inspired by him; and the next day you found that he had fled!"¹

Perhaps it was just as well. He could never have been a personal leader like Conway. One could be challenged by his scholarship and idealism; one could sit at his feet; but communication with him was not easy. Havelock Ellis, nearly twenty years his junior, could still recall, half a century after meeting him for the first time, "a Scottish temperament carried to the point of genius. . . . I came away feeling that this man was the most remarkable man, the most intensely alive man, I had ever met; I am not at all sure I should not say so still." Yet in the give and take of friendly argument, Davidson seemed to feel betrayed by any opposition. Sometime before 1888, in the face of Ellis's "obstinate criticism", their correspondence ceased.² Ellis claimed that Davidson "cured him" of philosophers.

Even his fellow philosophers found him difficult. William James, who thought Davidson an exemplar of friendship, knight-errantry, and wholesome inner contentment, commented: "There are men whose attitude is always that of seeking for truth; and men who, on the contrary, always believe they have the root of the matter already in them. Davidson was one of the latter class."³

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James felt consequently that it was impossible to learn anything from him.

Bernard Shaw, who must have attended at least one early Fellowship meeting, reported years later to Henry Salt that when the "learned Scottish professor" (not named, but certainly Davidson) discoursed on "the cultivation of a perfect character", the audience fell into such bewildered silence that the chairman turned finally to Shaw to break it. Dutifully Shaw said that his mind was a perfect blank and that he had been "bored as he had never been bored before". Shaw remained remorseful about this outburst, and in after years when Davidson sent him a copy of his new book, he meant to atone for his former insult by writing a "pleasant" review. "But when I looked into the book I felt all my old feelings return."⁴

In spite of the human flaw that engendered such antipathies, Davidson set loose sufficient energies in his Chelsea rooms to keep a self-improvement society in existence for a decade and a half. Among the early recruits were E. R. Pease, William Clarke, Henry Hyde Champion, Percival Chubb, Frank Podmore, Hubert Bland, Edward Carpenter, Dr. Burns Gibson, and J. Ramsay MacDonald. There were a few "emancipated" women, too, including Edith M. O. Lees, and "a granddaughter of Robert Owen".⁵ It is safe to assume that Shaw did not attend the Davidson gatherings regularly. Chubb introduced Havelock Ellis both to Davidson and to Edith Lees, Ellis's future wife.

At first the meetings were informal, by Davidson's invitation. Maurice Adams mentions September 1882 as the date when Davidson first "gathered together a number of people interested in religious thought, ethical propaganda, and social reform", but it is likely that some meetings preceded this.⁶ On 24 October the Fellowship was duly constituted. The minutes expressed the intention to unite "for the purpose of common living, as far as possible on a communistic basis, realizing among themselves the higher life". The members would not, at least for the present, give up the pursuit of their present callings in the world.⁷ The basis of the Fellowship from the beginning was breathtakingly simple:

Object: The cultivation of a perfect character in each and all.

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Principle: The subordination of material things to spiritual things.

Fellowship: The sole and essential condition of fellowship shall be a single-minded, sincere, and strenuous devotion to the object and principle.

The programme then went on to propose steps towards the establishment of a model community. Regard for the general good would replace competition. Manual labour would be united with intellectual pursuits. Education and improvement would be the centre of their lives within the community. Members would meet regularly for religious communion, lectures, and study groups.⁸ They had also a motto from Goethe: *Im Ganzen, Guten, Schönen resolut zu leben*.

Throughout 1882 and 1883 there was much argument over Davidson's manifesto entitled "Vita Nuova", proposed, actually, by Dr. Gibson. This went even further than the basic programme of the New Fellowship. It asked that members agree to live openly, put aside all prejudice, banish selfishness, introduce regularity into their lives, avoid gossip, critically review each day's work—and so on through a complete new Deuteronomy. The Fellowship did not adopt the charter, but two attempts at a modified form of communal living—one on each side of the Atlantic—did emerge from Davidson's ideas.

To anyone acquainted with the London of the period, the very names on the roster will reveal the difficulties of these proposals. Too many of those involved had the temperaments of political activists. On 16 December 1883 Frank Podmore wrote to Percival Chubb (then Secretary) proposing that two societies be formed instead of one—one continuing as the Fellowship of the New Life and another, not named, "on somewhat broader and more indeterminate lines", with each person deciding for himself whether to join one or the other or both. Out of this suggestion the Fabian Society was born, which did indeed become broader, though scarcely indeterminate. Shaw, carefully eschewing mention of the name of Davidson's Fellowship, recalled in 1892,

The Fabian Society was warlike in its origin; it came into existence through a schism in an earlier society for the peaceful

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regeneration of the race by the cultivation of perfection of individual character. Certain members of that circle, modestly feeling that the revolution would have to wait an unreasonably long time if postponed until they personally had attained perfection, set up the banner of Socialism militant; seceded from the Regenerators; and established themselves independently as the Fabian Society.⁹

Shaw was not at the meeting of 4 January 1884 at Pease's rooms at 17 Osnaburgh Street when Podmore's motion launched the Fabians, and, in spite of his earlier knowledge of Davidson, claimed he "discovered" the Fabians through the publication of their first tract. But by May he was a member, and within a year he had brought in both Sidney Webb and Sydney Olivier. Thereafter the vigour of Davidson's Fellowship flowed more and more through Socialist channels. Nevertheless a valiant handful sustained the Fellowship for fifteen years as a contributing member of London's regenerative societies.

Davidson was naturally disappointed with the direction his creature had taken, though he was aware of the lure Socialism held for reformers. Both *laissez-faire* Capitalism and Socialism, he maintained, were equally based on the completely unethical, assumption "that selfish desire is the spring of all production and all distribution", and that ethical reform was the prior condition of any possible economic reform. He asked his followers to seek first the Kingdom of God. In 1890 he wrote back to the Fellowship from America:

While I do not for a moment believe that [Socialism] will accomplish the good which its adherents expect from it, it will have this very beneficial result, that it will finally make clear, even to the blindest and most prejudiced, that no measure of success is to be hoped for from any economic reform which has not for its presupposition an ethical reform. If State socialism or nationalism were the law of the land tomorrow (and it may be so before many tomorrows are over), and men were no more ethical than they are today, selfishness would find means to exploit and oppress ignorance, simple honesty and unselfishness, as much as it does now, if not more.¹⁰

The Fellowship of the New Life

Davidson's views on virtue (G.B.S. to the contrary notwithstanding) seem far from dull. In a New York lecture he discoursed on the *positive* virtues. Sins, he reminds us, are classified in the Prayer Book as those of "omission" and "commission". Why should not virtues be so characterized also? The virtue of simply avoiding evil should hardly be given the same weight as that of doing positive good. The old monks' vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience were all negative. So is the prayer to "deliver us from evil". So is all that part of Christianity that urges us to become as little children and regain lost innocence, rather than accept the adult risks of contributing to the world's good. Davidson envisions a graph on which virtue might be evaluated by moving a point above or below the line of "virtue-zero", the status society normally calls "respectability".

The view of man's nature revealed to us by the doctrine of evolution shows us that man is not a fallen creature but a perpetually rising one—that his moral aim is not to attain a zero-point of virtue, the state of paradisiac innocence, but to increase forever in positive, active virtue and power.¹¹

And this would seem to be compatible, at least, with Shaw's own notions of creative evolution.

The faith that many of his contemporaries entrusted to science, Davidson gave to education. Few people have believed in the powers of learning as unequivocally as he. Any man or woman who has not educated himself to be a profound thinker "is still a slave to authority and convention, a mere play actor in life, bound to play a traditional, unreal part, without any of the glorious liberty of the children of God, of them who see the Divine face to face, and, in the light thereof, all things in their true worth".¹² The education of teachers was consequently high among his priorities. He wanted to found an "ethical normal school" which would be a complete miniature commonwealth in which teachers could learn "life" as well as "lessons" and go forth as missionaries.

In the midst of the other London heretics Davidson may appear, with his religious sentiments, almost conventional; yet he did not profess Christianity and he could not find a home with any sect. He believed with Rosmini that there was one ultimate

reality present in all things, leading to an essential divinity of all life, especially of human life. The atoms of which the universe is composed must include intelligence and feeling. "Sentience and desire are two aspects of the same fundamental fact."¹³ He believed, too, in immortality, though not in any other-worldly sense. "We are eternal and we are here forever," he wrote to his New York wage-earner students during his last illness. "Death is but an incident in an eternal career. . . . You have existed from all eternity, else you wouldn't exist now, but you have not been conscious from all eternity."¹⁴

It was on this subject that Havelock Ellis found discussion with Davidson next to impossible. Temperamentally Ellis did not belong with this group, nor in fact with any of the vigorous world-betterment societies. It was only his attraction to Olive Schreiner and to Edith Lees that brought him into contact with such disparate characters as Aveling and Davidson. Though he had had a hand in framing the New Fellowship manifesto, he had been a casual attender of their meetings until he became aware of Edith in 1887. Always intrigued by the vagaries of the human specimen, Ellis kept himself removed in an attitude of sympathetic world-weariness. He concluded his autobiography by saying, "I see life whole, coldly, nakedly, all round, and although I am glad it is over, though I would not live it again, yet, now that I seem to view it whole, I view it with joy, even with ecstasy." Characteristically Ellis thought that Davidson's energetic temperament was not really optimism, but some deep-seated lack of adjustment. He would probably have discredited one of Davidson's last recorded statements if he had known of it: "I don't know what *Weltschmerz* is, and I have no fear of death."¹⁵

Upon his return to New York from London, Davidson acquired a tract of land in the Adirondacks as a site for yet another attempt at his new order. He called it Glenmore. It was at Keene, near Lake Placid in Essex County. It functioned as a "Summer School for the Cultural Sciences", and continued to be used by Ethical Culture groups after his death. John Dewey, James R. Angell, Felix Adler, and Lowes Dickinson were among the attenders there. Behind the house a granite boulder marks Davidson's grave.¹⁶

Glenmore, and his interest in the Educational Alliance on New

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York's lower east side, absorbed Davidson's final years. As the aftermath of a discussion period following one of his speeches, he undertook to found a "breadwinners' college" for east side labourers who, long before the forty-hour week, had few evening hours to devote to self-improvement. An account of this successful early experiment in adult education was published posthumously in 1904 as *The Education of the Wage-Earners*.¹⁷ Among the more literate and ambitious of these labourers Davidson found perhaps his most appreciative and lasting audience. He gave himself to them week after week, using educational methods that heralded the emerging educational philosophy of John Dewey and his followers. Certainly the wage-earners whose lives he had changed by his peculiar combination of realism and idealism were among his chief mourners when he died in 1900.

Back in London his society, under the less cumbersome designation of the New Fellowship, had a brief resurgence of vitality. In 1889 it issued a handsome journal, *The Sower*, which became after a single issue, *Seed-time*. By 1891 the New Fellowship had acquired "Fellowship House" for group living at 29 Doughty Street. *Seed-time*, a quarterly, was certainly the most distinguished looking of the little uplift magazines of the period. It was beautifully printed by a "saintly" Russian anarchist, a former aristocrat and general, who went by the name of William Frey. Copies are now extremely rare items. The Fellowship scheduled weekly lecture meetings—alternately "theoretical" and "practical"—indicating that the dichotomy in its origins had never wholly fused, even though, presumably, the Fabians had gone their own ways. For other audiences the Fellowship offered free lectures on such topics as "Moral and Social Reform", "Christianity and Commercialism", and "The Moral Basis of the New Order".

Actually neither *Seed-time* nor the weekly lectures could have continued long without the help of such Socialists as William Morris, Stopford Brooke, Sydney Olivier, Hubert Bland, Henry S. Salt, and James Ramsay MacDonald. The organization was held together by the devotion of a few members, notably Edith Lees. It sponsored a successful kindergarten. It threatened to enter the sectarian lists in earnest in 1890 when W. J. Jupp

resigned as minister of Thornton Heath Congregational Church at Croydon, and there set up another "free religious movement" based on "the ethical and social principles of the New Fellowship".¹⁸ A branch of the Fellowship began in Manchester.

But the programme was too vague to compete with the thunder of the Secularists or the lures of the Socialists. In this milieu the "Conditions for Membership" of the New Fellowship did not have wide appeal.

Anyone in sympathy with the aims and views of the New Fellowship and who will endeavour to the utmost of his ability to order his life in accordance with its principles, may become a member. He will be required to send a letter of application for membership to the Secretary, who will lay it before the membership at the next meeting. If accepted the applicant will become a member on payment of a subscription of not less than 6s. a year.¹⁹

Before it disappeared completely from the London scene, however, it recorded one more effort to approach Davidson's ideal of group living. It was somewhat less successful than a Rosminian monastery. Edith Lees served as a kind of chief functionary for Fellowship House, though, of course, no one on the premises could impose his or her will on another. Edith Lees was especially concerned about the condescension towards servants, for example. Her chief associate at the House in those days was Ramsay MacDonald—though he refused to recall the experience when he later became Prime Minister.

If we may rely once again on Havelock Ellis's memory, the "crew" included, in addition, a journalist named Lespinasse; an elderly and quixotic Captain P-foundes, who lectured on Japan; and Agnes Henry, an active anarchist. And there were constant streams of strange visitors. The House attracted many Russian exiles who were sympathetic to its near-anarchist ideals. William Morris, whose romantic brand of Socialism came closer to Davidson's dream than did that of most Socialists, once wrote (in *A Dream of John Ball*) that "fellowship is heaven". Edith Lees was finally driven to declare, "Fellowship is Hell." She recounted her experience in the novel, *Attainment*.

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In December 1891 Edith married Havelock Ellis and resigned her position at the House. It did not endure long after she left. *Seed-time*, however, and the Fellowship itself lasted till 1896. It was never a large or dramatic society. Its total receipts for 1893 were less than seventy-five pounds, and its highest hopes were for one hundred. In the year the Fellowship disappeared its Fabian offspring, with a carefully screened membership, numbering over a thousand, had developed a disciplined mode of operation under an impressive executive committee, and had seventy influential publications in circulation.

"The true end of each individual is perfection, or the complete development of all his faculties in a natural and healthy human life. But such development is only possible for each in that organic union with his fellows which we call society."²⁰ Its pedantic phrasing was part of Davidson's personality, and part of what alienated him from many of his peers. Still the Fabians were no more likely to solve the embarrassing dilemma than the fumbling organizations he had himself put together on either side of the Atlantic.

5 Spiritualism and the London Theosophists

All the movements so far considered had a London centre. Even Positivism, which owed its existence to a French philosopher, was taken seriously as an organized society only in London. Secularism and all forms of Freethought were nineteenth-century phenomena of the entire Western world, but they had unique and particular structure in the British capital after 1870, and they became, so to speak, an export item. Theosophy, as it was represented by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, was an import item. Its roots were scarcely in Britain at all. Yet the impact of Madame Blavatsky on the London intelligentsia during her fleeting visit of 1884 and during her residence there in the last four years of her life makes it impossible to ignore either her or

her organization in any consideration of the local heresies of the day.

Theosophy differs in another way. It was a heresy of the right. The Positivists, too, especially the Congrevian branch, had reactionary aspects in their need for formal prayer and ritual. Indeed, the "afterglow" of church-worship ran through all the heretical societies in varying degrees. Theosophy, however, in spite of protestations to the contrary, rested on revelation. It became, as it developed, mystical, other-worldly, ritualistic, select. It was a rival religion that failed to develop an adequate theology. Moncure Conway, as the only sceptical participant in a seance, once compared the frenzy of what he had witnessed with what must have been the frenzy of the early disciples who convinced themselves of the resurrection.¹ Theosophy, too, was suffused with the desperate will to believe.

It would be unfair to equate Theosophy with Spiritualism, but Theosophy could not have made a serious bid for attention among Londoners—or elsewhere—if a revival of Spiritualism had not preceded it. The Blavatsky advent depended also on a new interest in the Orient—a fascination supported by limited information. Even Japan was easy enough to romanticize (Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* was first staged in 1885); Tibet, the legendary home of the oft-reincarnated Mahatmas of Theosophy, was almost literally inaccessible, and in imagination part of another world.

The practice of Spiritualism in London of the seventies took many forms, from mere sensationalism to genuine scientific inquiry and honest religious seeking. One of the original Fox sisters from Hydeville, New York, was active in London. The three daughters of John D. Fox had precipitated the Spiritualistic renaissance about 1848 by setting up a communication with the dead by means of rappings. The Fox home thereafter became a mecca for would-be mediums and a prime target for the sceptics. Both seemed to find there the "proofs" they came to search for. Interest, in any case, spread rapidly to England where it became centred in various small cults. In 1872 it emerged as "respectable" when an Anglican clergyman, William Stainton Moses, espoused it, and edited the chief Spiritualist paper, *Light*.

Shortly thereafter Catherine Fox, since become Mrs. Jencken,



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attempted to found a British National Association of Spiritualists (1874). She was joined by a Mr. Home, who had also promoted Spiritualism in Paris. There was already in existence the "Spiritual Institution of Mr. Burns" which had been formed at Camberwell, but had since moved to a more central location at 15 Southampton Row, a site that remained, according to the Rev. Davies, the focal point of London Spiritualism for years.

It should come as no surprise that that curious minister-journalist did not omit the occult experiences from his charming survey of heterodoxy. He was, however, in these instances sworn to secrecy concerning the identity of the participants. The seances he attended were mostly on Sunday evenings and in central London. Some were tied to religious rites. In fact, several had Church of England ritual, and one was preceded by a communion service. All this was to Davies more marvellous than anything that could be produced from the seance itself.

Admission to the medium's rooms was strictly by invitation, though each attender was expected to make a contribution. The lights were always dim. Usually there was something like an altar in addition to a sideboard. There were chairs for about fifty persons. Davies himself found nothing that could not have been controlled by the medium. The "messages" from the departed spirits were non-committal, such as, "We are sent to tell you God is love, and that we live." Sometimes the attenders came in the hope of curing their illnesses. Generally the seances were in sumptuous surroundings. The participants were of all shades of religious and political opinion, and included persons of wealth and position.

The prospectus for the new Association of Spiritualists claimed sympathy with the teachings of Jesus, but stayed carefully clear of doctrinal affiliations. It recognized the permanence of man's inner nature and the possibility of communication with the dead. Like all such groups it supported "scientific" research into all forms of Spiritualism and pledged itself to expose frauds. This was a fairly conservative prospectus. Some devotees tried to link Spiritualism with social reforms, the existence of Guardian Angels, the Day of Judgment, Cremation, Women's Rights, and Foreign Missions.

Mrs. Cora Tappan (*née* Cora Hatch), a Spiritualist orator

from America, drew great crowds to St. George's Hall in 1873. Her oratory was of the "inspirational" variety, resting heavily on Biblical support. Mrs. Tappan, with her borrowings from the East, and her glimpses into "past ages of which we know nothing", gave Londoners a prelude to the more complex Theosophical revelations that were to come. Tracts distributed at such meetings gave impressive lists of books, periodicals, and names of "believers". The rosters included, of course, the name of any famous person who had at any time expressed some tendency towards taking the subject seriously: i.e., Abraham Lincoln.

But in fact nearly all the intellectuals of the seventies and eighties gave Spiritualism some attention. Two great women novelists corresponded across the ocean about it. In 1872 Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote to George Eliot of a "conversation" carried on with the shade of Charlotte Brontë by means of a *planchette*—a small board on casters, attached to a pencil, which wrote messages when moved involuntarily by hands placed upon it. But George Eliot found the message itself "so enormously improbable" that she rejected the idea. "I would not willingly place any barrier between my mind and any possible channel of truth affecting the human lot," she wrote. But all she had to go by was the "lowest charlatanerie".²

Among such charlatanerie George Eliot included Daniel Dunglas Home, a Mrs. Samuel Guppy, and William Crookes, the eminent scientist, who was persuaded that Spiritualistic phenomena were evidence of a new force in the physical world. Crookes carried on his Spiritualistic experiments with two female mediums. Moncure Conway thought Crookes was simply too "polite" to deal with them as searchingly as he dealt with his chemicals. One of the women, who held seances weekly near the British Museum, was thoroughly put to rout when two investigators from the Museum attended with a flashlight. In spite of this the respected scientist, Alfred Wallace, wrote to *The Times* defending Spiritualism.

Conway also attended one of Mrs. Guppy's seances at her house in Hampstead, accompanied by his mathematical young friend, Prof. William K. Clifford. They managed to get on either side of the medium when the lights were lowered. Everyone was requested to name something "likely to be near by" that might

be thrown on the table. Clifford demanded the false teeth which were in his overcoat pocket in the hall beyond the door. Conway asked for a large bandbox. When the lights were turned on, all the other items were on hand—the rose, the onion, the slipper, etc.—but not the teeth or the box. Mrs. Guppy declared the seance a failure. The same team helped to expose a medium named Williams, who was later discredited at Rotterdam when customs officials seized his paraphernalia of wigs, masks, rag hands, and phosphorus.³

Oliver Lodge, Frank Benson, and A. Conan Doyle were among those who believed in Spiritualism, not to mention William T. Stead, whose special contributions we shall note. Fabian Frank Podmore had a lifelong interest in the subject. The London Society for Psychical Research had its beginnings in his rooms at 14 Dean's Yard, Westminster, in 1882. Podmore wrote a two-volume work on *Modern Spiritualism* (1902) as well as an earlier *Studies in Psychical Research*. At the end of his labours he had found nothing that could be called convincing evidence of psychical phenomena, but neither could he explain all the data from natural causes. Incredulity, he decided, could be as great a superstition as credulity.

Podmore was joined on occasion by fellow Fabians E. R. Pease and G. B. Shaw in the examination of haunted houses in search of poltergeist. Shaw described to his biographer, Henderson, his night in a haunted house with a committee of ghost-hunters. Henderson maintains that Shaw had no belief in Spiritualism but took a tolerant attitude towards it because his mother and a number of his friends had varying degrees of faith in it.⁴

In such a climate it was inevitable that a London branch of the Theosophical Society should be formed soon after the original one was initiated in New York on 7 September 1875. For Theosophists the source of wisdom was the East. On their way to India Madame Blavatsky and the American Colonel, Henry Steele Olcott, the co-founder and President of the TS, made the passage through England in December 1878. Their arrival had been much heralded, and they were joyously welcomed by the

London band of believers, including Mrs. Billing (a medium) and her husband, with whom they stayed at Norwood.

They were in London only a fortnight, but it was long enough for Mme. Blavatsky to indulge in some of her old Spiritualist tricks. She kept resenting the fact that Theosophy seemed wedded in the public mind to Spiritualistic phenomena instead of to the high ideals of true wisdom and brotherhood on which the Society was based. Yet she herself had been so skilled a practitioner of the occult arts that she could not refrain from making use of them whenever it seemed that they might help the good cause along. In this instance Mrs. Billing became controlled by a spirit named "Ski", who threw at Olcott, during a seance, a silk handkerchief on which the names of several of the Masters were written. Ski also told Olcott to go to Mme. Tussaud's and look under the left foot of Waxwork Number 158 for a note from "a certain Personage". It was a message from the Master, Serapis.⁵

Helena Blavatsky was too colourful a character to be overlooked by biographers, most of whom have been fascinated but sceptical. Gertrude Williams⁶ complains that almost all the source material of Blavatsky's early life has been tampered with; whereas an "authorized" biographer such as William Kingsland must accept his subject's own dictum:

Between HPB from 1875 and HPB from 1831 to that date, is a veil drawn, and you are in no way concerned with what took place behind it, before I appeared as a public character. . . . Had I even been all they accuse me of; had I lovers and children by the bushels; who among all that lot is *pure enough* to cast the first stone?⁷

In other words, her past history had no relevant bearing on the story of the Theosophical Society beyond what she herself was willing to reveal. Not many biographers would be willing to accept such a limitation on their subjects.

The problem presents itself almost immediately; for although it is not our purpose to recount the whole story either of Blavatsky or the Society, we find it difficult to answer so simple a question as: was the 1878 visit her first to London? Her answer was that she had been there twice before—once as a girl

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of thirteen with her father in order to study music; and once in 1851 when she was twenty, also with her father. Of this latter visit, she has reported through a devotee, the Countess Wachtmeister:

She was one day out walking when, to her astonishment, she saw a tall Hindu in the street with some Indian princes. She immediately recognized him as the same person she had seen in the Astral. Her first impulse was to rush forward and speak to him, but he made a sign not to move and she stood as if spellbound while he passed on. . . . The next day she went to Hyde Park for a stroll, that she might be alone and free to think over the extraordinary adventure. Looking up she saw the same form approach her, and then the Master told her he had come to London with the Indian princes on an important mission, and he was desirous of meeting her personally, as he required her co-operation in a work which he was about to undertake. He then told her how the Theosophical Society was to be formed, and that he wished her to be the founder. He gave her a slight sketch of all the troubles she would have to undergo, and also told her that she would have to spend three years in Thibet to prepare her for the important task.

After three days' serious consideration and consultation with her father, HPB decided to accept the offer made to her, and shortly afterwards left London for India.⁸

This account—even to the extent of her being in London at that time—is in complete variance with what little is known of her life after her marriage to General Nicephore Blavatsky at the age of seventeen (1848) and her subsequent flight from him, culminating in her disappearance from an English ship bound for Constantinople. She was unheard of for ten years, and her whereabouts were quite vague for twenty-five. The lost years became a useful part of the Blavatsky legend in her later life. But the past can never be wholly obscured, and the rents in the fabric were to prove especially embarrassing during yet another visit to London in 1884.

By this time the world headquarters of the movement had been established in Adyar, India, in an imposing compound she had acquired cheaply through the help of an Indian friend. She

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had left it (she thought) in the good hands of faithful, though recent, converts, and had had a great summer success among the mystical and curious of Paris. Then, on 30 June, she walked in unannounced on a London meeting of the Society, bringing with her Col. Olcott and an Indian chela, Mohini, who immediately prostrated himself and kissed the hem of her garment. Her entrance terminated the speech of her disciple, Alfred P. Sinnett, author of *The Occult World*.

Worship of this woman was contagious, and it spread beyond the confines of the Society's meeting room. It was helped by Olcott's skilful stage-management. Scientists and poets besieged her. The Press reported her every movement. She had come, she said, because the Masters ordered her to do so for her health, though she personally could not see why they should send her abroad to get relief, "when they could as well cure me [in India] as they did twice before". Beyond that her mission was to overthrow Spiritualism, to convert materialists, and to demonstrate the existence of the Masters.⁹ The magnetism of the fifty-three-year-old prophetess had nothing to do with attractiveness in the usual sense. Always too coarse-featured to be termed beautiful, she was now corpulent and habitually untidy. She smoked constantly cigarettes which she kept rolling herself from a mixture that probably included hashish. Nevertheless she was variously described as brilliant, captivating, and dynamic. Certainly she was neurotic, impulsive, mystical. And seldom did a reporter who had occasion to come into her presence fail to mention the hypnotic power of her azure eyes. W. T. Stead was simultaneously delighted and repelled by her.

Power was there, rude and massive, but she had the manners of a man, and a very unconventional man, rather than those of a lady. But we got on very well together, and Madame gave me her portrait, certifying that I might call myself what I pleased, but that she knew I was a good Theosophist.¹⁰

Another interviewer declared that his only hold on reality was her "great heavy Blücher shoes".¹¹

In London Colonel Olcott visited the Colonial Office on behalf of the Singhalese Buddhists to lay before it some of their grievances. He also tried to cultivate the Society for Psychical Re-

search, which had some Theosophist members and which seemed on friendly terms with Sinnett. In fact Sinnett had thought the two organizations might eventually join, and produced a letter from the most approachable of the Masters, Koot Hoomi, wishing the SPR well. But Sinnett would have preferred the party not to have come to England. He watched with apprehension as Blavatsky became more sharp-tongued under questioning, or as she prostrated herself before an unseen Mahatma. Her Hindu retinue began to show distaste for the persistent inquiries. Olcott himself, always astute, became long-winded and vague. They were under the scrutiny of the SPR, and were quite well aware of the fact.

Troublesome news also came constantly from Adyar. It was here that the break in Madame's past was about to show through.

One of Theosophy's more attractive and disarming aspects was its effort to blend the philosophies of the East and West. It liked to use Oriental terminology and to wrap itself up in Eastern mysticism. Thus *Karma* was the cause-and-effect relationship operating on the soul between reincarnations; and *Manas* were the states of man's mind or intellect or spirit. There were Higher and Lower *Manas*, tending towards the spiritual or material respectively. In this classification Intellect was on a lower level than Intuition. In the world of Theosophy man had this dual nature throughout—*Personality* being the lower wilful self, as distinguished from the eternal spirit of which every man is a part. All this, in essence, is familiar enough to any Christian mystic or to any reader of Western philosophy, and Kingsland, in explanation, quotes William James, Henri Bergson, and Jacob Böhme, as well as the Mahatmas, to establish this duality.¹²

Quite obviously this is not the stuff of which popular movements are made. The real vogue of Theosophy arose from the miracles, or, as Theosophists would prefer to say, the *phenomena*, connected with the Masters. Those who achieve a high enough plane to go beyond mere mysticism to Occultism can establish communication with the Masters (Mahatmas). These Masters are neither gods nor angels, but beings who have arrived through many reincarnations at a stage of existence where their bodies, and the material world in general, no longer hamper them. They

can course through the world at will, leaving messages, and even on rare occasions appearing in the dim pre-dawn beside the bed of one of the faithful.

Mme. Blavatsky had established communication with a number of the Mahatmas, of whom Koot Hoomi proved most accessible and even chatty. Master Morya, whom she called "the boss", was more aloof. Though the Masters wrote also to others—notably to Sinnett—letters always had to be routed through Mme. Blavatsky as long as she lived.

The Masters not only wrote letters, however. They "dictated" to Mme. Blavatsky two enormous tomes, *Isis Unveiled*, soon after the Society had been created (1875-77), and *The Secret Doctrine*, on which she continued to work until the end of her life. There were shorter literary works, too. When she was so ill that she did not expect to live, she was ordered to visit Sikkim, where she had long communion with both Morya and Koot Hoomi and actually saw them there "in their bodies both". She returned to her remaining work renewed in health and vigour. But the Masters also did some purely sensational tricks. They delivered a letter from aboard ship in mid-ocean, for example—though there was no point of urgency in the contents. And they renewed a broken vase in the shrine room of Theosophist Headquarters, Adyar.

Such phenomena many of the faithful later regretted, and it is Kingsland's view that the Mahatmas regretted them too. They became so much a part of the public image of Blavatsky, that it became difficult to take the movement seriously if the phenomena were tinged with chicanery. Indeed it became impossible for both Blavatsky and those who succeeded her to convince the public that Theosophy did not depend on such miracles, and would be better off without them.

While Mme. Blavatsky was exerting her strange charm upon Londoners in 1884, a bitter struggle broke loose within the tenuous structure of her Theosophical Society back in India. Her arch enemies, the Christian missionaries at Madras, had been successful in obtaining for publication, "the Coulomb letters". Madame Coulomb had been Miss Emma Cutting near the end of Helena Blavatsky's residence in Cairo in the early 1870s. There, according to Gertrude Williams, HPB was engaged in studying

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magic under Paulos Metamon. There, too, she lived with a popular operatic bass, Agardi Metrovitch, and bore him a deformed child who died at the age of seven. Eventually Metrovitch also died, and she turned to Spiritualism as a profession. When, therefore, Emma Cutting, with her husband, Alexis Coulomb, appeared in India, Mme. Blavatsky hastened to give them both employment.

Regardless of what one may think of Helena Blavatsky, it is hard to regard Mme. Coulomb as an admirable character. There is little doubt that she used as blackmail her knowledge of her mistress's past and other knowledge of the "phenomena" foolishly entrusted to her. So long as her own persuasive presence was near by, HPB could dominate this weaker woman. But when the unseasoned disciples whom Blavatsky had left in charge demanded the keys to the occult room and the adjoining bedroom, the Coulombs refused to surrender them. The ensuing quarrel ended before the magistrate. The rejected Coulombs took refuge with the hostile missionaries, bringing their sense of outrage with them. When sufficient time had passed and no countermanding order had come from London in their support, Mme. Coulomb finally carried out her threat and delivered to the missionaries the packet of letters from Blavatsky.

The best account of the Coulomb revelations is given by John Symonds in his *Madame Blavatsky, Medium and Magician*.¹³ This is the latest and in many ways the best of the full-length studies of the controversial lady, even though it lacks notes and an index. He concludes that "if what Madame Coulomb says about Madame Blavatsky is true—and her words breathe the harsh spirit of truth—then Madame Blavatsky was one of the world's great jokers".¹⁴ It was enough, in any case, to disillusion Sinnett. He reasoned simply that Mme. Coulomb had not the ability to invent such clever forgeries.

Blavatsky left England for India to rescue what she could of the falling house of cards. As proof that her own personal magnetism had not abated, she took with her the Cooper-Oakleys (he a Cambridge man, she a writer), who had sold all their belongings; and a middle-aged curate, C. W. Leadbeater, who had renounced Christianity for Buddhism and Theosophy.

The Non-Christians

Almost simultaneously the Society for Psychical Research, eager to publish the facts about Theosophy, whatever they turned out to be, dispatched young Richard Hodgson to go to Adyar for a three-month investigation. The points of view on this investigation naturally differed. The Theosophical Society felt that HPB was under attack and should have the kind of guarantees accorded in an English court of law, and in the meantime should be presumed innocent. But Hodgson was hardly competent to act as an entire court, and the SPR claimed it was not putting Blavatsky on trial, but simply investigating evidence of psychic phenomena to determine if there was sufficient support to put them on record. Hodgson, however, found himself in the midst of a controversy in which it was difficult for him to act as other than a judge.

His 200-page report concluded that the charges of charlatanry made by the Coulombs were true. The Mahatma Letters had all been written by Blavatsky herself in a cleverly disguised hand. The shrine at Adyar had been hastily dismantled before Hodgson's arrival, but Hodgson received testimony that the wonders committed there had been effected through sliding panels and similar contrivances. All favourable testimony concerning the Mahatmas he found to be of a highly dubious—and often hallucinatory—nature.

Kingsland was probably right in saying that these charges of fraudulence would not hold in a court of law. Still the faithful thought it better to keep "the Old Lady" out of court, and out of the hands of the public prosecutor. The argument over the fairness of the Hodgson Report has never ceased, and as recently as 1963 the Theosophical Publishing House at Adyar issued Adlai E. Waterman's *Obituary: The Hodgson Report on Madame Blavatsky*. This attempts to reverse the Hodgson verdict by showing that the Coulombs cleverly framed all the most damaging evidence, and that Hodgson was almost an accomplice. Mr. Waterman at least makes no pretence that the phenomena have nothing to do with the real spiritual truthfulness of Theosophy:

It is unthinkable that a practised deceiver, stooping low in vile conspiracy to hoodwink her faithful followers by elaborate fraudulent devices, would at the same time be a chosen vessel

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for the highest kind of spiritual truth and moral guidance, or the occult-endowed associate of such exalted human beings as the Mahatmas of Theosophy.¹⁵

This is precisely what many of her contemporaries thought, and in the wake of the SPR report came wholesale defections, public confessions, threatened lawsuits. The Committee of the SPR to which Hodgson reported expressed its conclusions in less juridical terms:

The testimony to these marvels is in no case sufficient . . . to resist the force of the general presumption . . . that the occult power of the Mahatmas [is] to be explained as due either to deliberate deception . . . or spontaneous illusion.¹⁶

But even this, in the Press, amounted to a verdict of "guilty".

Since 1939 many of the "Mahatma Papers" have been deposited in the British Museum, available for general scholarly perusal.¹⁷ They are the ones addressed to Alfred Sinnett, and include those used by him in his writing of *The Occult World* (New York, 1887). The opening letter (undated, but in the autumn of 1880) is addressed to "Esteemed Brother and Friend", beautifully handwritten on twelve sides and signed "Koot Hoomi Lalsingh". It speaks of "the devoted woman who so foolishly rushes into the wide open door leading to notoriety", and advises him to stop asking for miracles. As time goes on the handwriting deteriorates slightly but remains distinctive. The signature becomes merely "K.H." The Mahatma makes very human mistakes, sometimes crossing out, sometimes smearing the ink. His tone is generally flattering ("good friend and brilliant author"). Sometimes he answers Sinnett's questions by brief margin notations or by writing on the reverse of the original letter. Generally he has all kinds of patience. To a series of twenty-eight complex metaphysical questions, K.H. replies at pamphlet length.

There are a few letters from the Master Morya too. He writes in red ink, diagonally across the page, and in a hand that is far less legible than K.H.'s. His "r" is made with a strange backward loop, giving the calligraphy quite an unusual appearance. But in replies hurriedly written (Letters LXXIII and

LXXIV for example) the looped "r's" disappear. Many letters (the capital "A", the small "s", the word "the") are remarkably similar for Koot Hoomi, for Morya, and for Blavatsky; and all have perceptible relationship to the cursive Russian script in which Helena Petrovna Hahn first learned to write. The literary style betrays a mercurial temperament, passing from praise to condescension to impatient scolding in unpredictable succession. The Masters' comments to Sinnett about Blavatsky are always most disarming! In November of 1880 when she is just recovering from an illness and has been accused of being a Russian spy, she writes to K.H., accusing him of playing tricks on her. On the same paper, K.H. writes a note to Sinnett and sends it along to him:

Since even I am not above suspicion in her sight, you can hardly be too indulgent or use too many precautions until this dangerous nervous crisis is past. . . .¹⁸

Even the most faithful have been hard put to explain away the internal evidence that Mme. Blavatsky simply invented the Mahatmas. Kingsland suggests that "she was a telepathic amanuensis for some, but by no means all" of the letters.¹⁹ In other words, the Masters used her hand to write some of them—in the manner of spirit-writing practised by many mediums of the day. But which letters? And why some and not others?

Even if one cannot accept the orthodox Theosophical explanations of these phenomena (as it is obvious I cannot), one is left in a state of wonder at their magnitude. Surely the physical and mental effort expended in incessant letter writing in various hands, the production of multi-volume works of incomprehensible philosophy and pseudo-anthropology, the continuous behind-the-scenes arrangement of marvels—and, interspersed, the seemingly placid at-homes, charged with quiet electricity, delighting the most unsusceptible of guests—surely all this was more than a great hoax or a great joke. Blavatsky was, at the very least, one of history's supreme role-players. She was completely unendowed with the physical attributes of an actress. She never, in fact, faced audiences—it was Olcott who performed in public—yet in *tête-à-tête*, or in the privacy of her own room,

she convinced her followers and ultimately herself of the reality of a cast of characters far more fascinating than those found on most of the world's stages of the 1880s. Whether she achieved this with the help of hashish or by sheer imaginative paranoia matters little. The performances were convincing enough, and satisfying enough, to carry her through all manner of exposures and denunciations to new triumphs over and over again.

She had one other attribute of a great actress. She had periodic moments of pure sanity in which she was amused, pleased, or terrified at her own performances. It was this quality that removed her above her disciples, most of whom had not a grain of humour, and were either dupes or foils or conscious accessories. When Moncure Conway visited her at Adyar in 1884, he found her living in comparative wealth and ease. Those who believed in the supernatural part of Theosophy were well under the Blavatsky spell. Strange messages were received, for instance, when the devotees were flat on the floor with their hands over their eyes. Conway claims she confessed to him: "It's all glamour—people think they see what they do not see—that is the whole of it." This so disarmed Conway that he did not press her further.²⁰

At the end of March 1885, the proud woman was literally smuggled out of India as an invalid under an assumed name. The débâcle following the Hodgson Report was not the end either of Blavatsky or Theosophy. Her greatest triumph was yet to come. She went first to Europe and within a few months had secured the devotion of Countess Wachtmeister who cared for her at Würzburg and Ostend while she worked on *The Secret Doctrine*. With the collapse of the organization at Adyar she was once more next to penniless. She was ill of a kidney ailment. Most of her trusted disciples had defected. At this point two old English friends, Bertram and Archibald Keightley, appeared almost as magically as Mahatmas from Tibet. They insisted on helping her edit the new book, escorted her, once more, back to England, and settled her in their villa at Norwood, in South London.

Her first job in her new surroundings in 1887 was the completion of *The Secret Doctrine*. It was all revealed to her in dreams. "I see large and long rolls of paper," she wrote Sinnett,

"on which things are written and I recollect them." The revelations included information about "the first sub-race of the Root race," and many other matters going far back beyond all recorded history. "I have enough facts for twenty volumes like *Isis*. It is the language, the cleverness for compiling them that I lack."²¹ Bertram Keightley told of manuscript three feet high, in dreadful disorder, which he undertook to organize into three or four volumes—all needing correction in English and punctuation. Countess Wachtmeister was also there, and HPB had the scholarly assistance of E. D. Fawcett who checked on references and quotations. Nevertheless the Countess maintained that there were quotations from books that were never in the house, and that she later verified page references which Blavatsky had recorded from her visions.

Removed from the disaster in India, she soon found energy to establish her own territory once again. She formed her own Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society and instituted within it the Esoteric Section for the few highly disciplined *Inner Group*. With funds raised by friends she began her own magazine, *Lucifer*. She attracted into the Society, for a time, William Butler Yeats. Another Irish poet, George Russell ("AE") called *The Secret Doctrine*, on its publication, the most exciting book in a century.

There was little other critical acclaim for the two volumes that were published in March 1889, however. (Further volumes were in manuscript but had to wait for Annie Besant to bring them into print.) The San Francisco scholar, William Emmette Coleman, found in the work extended plagiarism and over six hundred false statements. Prof. Max-Müller, Oxford Orientalist, wrote and lectured against her. A new printing of the work was required by October.

Whether Annie Besant got the review copy of the volumes from Bernard Shaw (as he claimed) or directly from William T. Stead (as *he* claimed), or from both (as Arthur Nethercot surmises), the result was, as we have noted earlier, a triumph for Mme. Blavatsky.²² At forty-two, veteran of Secularist, Socialist, and Malthusian battles, Annie Besant admitted she was ready for Theosophy. She had apparently read Sinnett's *Occult World* and had been experimenting with Spiritualism. She was con-

vinced of the reality of clairvoyance, clairaudience, and thought-reading.

I finally convinced myself that there was some hidden thing, some hidden power, and resolved to seek until I found, and by the early Spring of 1889 I had grown desperately determined to find at all hazards what I sought.²³

After two sessions with HPB Annie was convinced. Blavatsky insisted that she read the SPR Report before joining the Society. Annie read it twice, and found that "everything turned on the veracity of the Coulombs". She preferred to put her trust in "the proud fiery truthfulness that shone at me from the clear, blue eyes".

Annie Besant never did anything by halves, and she quickly became the centre of the Theosophical Society in England. There was, for the moment, not much competition. A. P. Sinnett was still nominally a Theosophist, but had lost faith in Blavatsky and remained cool towards her. Other prominent members who had not defected were in India or America. Furthermore in 1890 HPB's health and energy were noticeably ebbing. In July of that year Annie deeded her Avenue Road residence to the Theosophical Society and brought the ailing prophetess to her last earthly home. Annie took over all the correspondence and the editing of *Lucifer*.

The move was a real sacrifice for her. After the scandals of *The Fruits of Philosophy* case, and the highly publicized removal of her daughter from her custody, she was only now re-establishing her acceptability in the broader London world by her work on the London School Board. She had won her seat on that body scarcely a year before over the vigorous opposition of clergymen and Tories, in a campaign in which ministers circulated handbills recalling all the notoriety of the past. Yet she was at the head of the poll in her district with nearly 16,000 votes. She did not look forward to ostracism and derision again. Especially she did not look forward to causing her gallant friend, Charles Bradlaugh, further pain and embarrassment.

Perhaps in return for these sacrifices, Blavatsky transferred gifts amounting to £1,000 to the establishment of a club for working girls in East London. Laura Cooper and Annie did

the spadework, and on 15 August 1890 at 193 Bow Road, Mme. Blavatsky made one of her few public appearances for the dedication. In her *Autobiography* Annie says that HPB was tender to human suffering, but there is little evidence of her social consciousness prior to this belated gesture.

Even in the quiet shelter of Avenue Road, Blavatsky was not permitted to dwell in the nostalgic aura of past battles. Across the ocean—to the west this time—the lead editorial of the *New York Sun* for Sunday, 20 July 1890, began:

The History of a Humbug

We publish today a wonderfully interesting history of the invention of the humbug of Theosophy. It is related by Prof. Elliott Coues of the Smithsonian Institution at Washington, an ornithologist of distinction, who at one time was deceived by Mme. Blavatsky's pretensions, but since has discovered her for the imposter she is.

There follows on page 17 a full-page interview with Dr. Coues which pictures Blavatsky as a pure charlatan, Olcott as a complete fool, and their followers as utter dupes. Coues states that Blavatsky was once a Russian spy, now dropped from their payroll. He hints of sexual malpractices under the guise of "initiation into phallic mysteries". The Society for virtue and wisdom is nothing but a shop window for the gullible. He retells, of course, the story of the Coulombs and the Hodgson Report. Blavatsky is "fat, gross, of abominable habits, an intolerable temper, swearing like a pirate and smoking like a chimney, of restless energy and endless craft".

The Society at once sued for libel. These things had been said before but never from so prestigious and damaging an orifice. *The Sun*, as a matter of fact, soon realized it had been indiscreet. Whereas it might have been perfectly safe in attacking Theosophy, there were in both the story and the editorial too many personal aspersions that might easily have been proved libellous. "The Old Lady" did not live to read the apologetic retraction.

She had been suffering from Bright's disease, rheumatism, and a bad heart. She never slept regularly, was not hygienic in her personal habits, and partook of an impossible diet. In the spring of 1891 she caught influenza and could not fight it off.

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The Countess was in Sweden, the Keightleys on a world tour, Annie on her way to America. On the 8th of May she died alone. About a hundred gathered for the cremation ceremonies at Woking.

To the great relief of *The Sun*, charges against it were dropped, and on 26 September 1892, far down in the third column of its editorial page it modestly made its peace with Theosophy:

We print on another page an article in which William Q. Judge deals with the romantic and extraordinary career of the late Madame Helena P. Blavatsky, the Theosophist. We take occasion to observe that on July 20, 1890, we were misled into admitting into *The Sun's* columns an article by Dr. E. F. Coues of Washington in which allegations were made against Madame Blavatsky's character, and also against her followers, which appear to have been without solid foundation. Mr. Judge's article disposes of all questions relating to Madame Blavatsky as presented by Dr. Coues, and we desire to say that his allegations respecting the Theosophical Society and Mr. Judge personally are not sustained by evidence, and should not have been printed.

The Judge article on page 5 (two columns) is all sweet reason and anecdote. It does not mention the offending Coues interview at all, but devotes itself to a laudatory obituary of the great lady. Judge barely mentions phenomena, and says practically nothing of the Masters. If the following paragraph were indeed the central essence of Theosophy, we would have to regard it as in the vanguard of the new spirit of the times:

The aim and object of her life were to strike off the shackles forged by priestcraft for the mind of man. She wished all men to know that they are God in fact, and that as men they must bear the burden of their own sins, for no one else can do it. Hence she brought forward to the West the old Eastern doctrines of karma and reincarnation. . . . She also desired that science should be brought back to the true ground where life and intelligence are admitted to be within and acting on and through every atom in the universe. Hence her object was to make religion scientific and science religious, so that the dogmatism of each might disappear.

Such had not been the central aspect of Theosophy while Blavatsky lived—though she would doubtless have endorsed such a statement. It was to mark the “new line” however in the post-Blavatsky era, of all but a small minority.

Sinnett, Judge, and Annie Besant all wanted to play down the supernatural elements of Theosophy. Olcott wanted at least to protect the good name of the dead founder. Yet miracles are not easily gotten rid of. It was Judge who discovered the supply of rice-paper, crayons, and the brass seal of the Mahatmas (according to his rivals), and learned the handwriting. And it was Besant who electrified her Hall of Science audience on 30 August 1891, on the occasion of her farewell to the National Secular Society, by declaring, “I tell you that since Mme. Blavatsky left I have had letters in the same handwriting which she received.”²⁴ She refused to exhibit these letters to the Press, but three years later when the Theosophists’ own Judicial Committee gathered in London in an attempt to patch up the rift in the organization, she revealed that the letters from the Masters had come through Judge. Even if she had been misled, they were “psychically true”.

The struggle for succession was bitter, but Olcott’s not wholly voluntary “retirement” in 1892, and Judge’s death in 1896, left Besant as the acknowledged head of the main body of the Society, with its capital re-established at Adyar. Mrs. Katherine Tingley, an American medium, captured the majority of the American flock and made her headquarters at Point Loma, California. There were at various times half a dozen other splinter groups, including the Theosophical Society of New York.

Slowly—very slowly—Annie Besant faded from the London scene and became part of the destiny of the new India. She remains, particularly at this juncture of her career, the most paradoxical of the heretical figures of the day. At the time of her conversion to Theosophy, G. W. Foote, who had looked with some misgivings on her rapid rise in the Secularist movement, made some pre-Freudian assumptions. She had embraced Socialism shortly after she had vigorously and publicly opposed it by supporting Bradlaugh in the Bradlaugh-Hyndman debates. Despite all her gifts and her charm, she was emotionally unstable. Foote observed that the inner circle of Theosophists were sworn, among other things, to celibacy. Physically, mentally,

and morally, such a rule of life, he warned, was attended with the gravest dangers.

Turned out of doors, nature climbs in at the window. The frustration of honest instinct makes men and women flighty and feverish, or fills them with the *malaise* of unsatisfied yearning. . . . Spiritism on the one side, and celibacy on the other, are the evil angels of Theosophy. I will not speculate on where they may lead an ardent and devoted nature like Mrs. Besant's.²⁵

Forty years later, after Annie and most of her cohorts had died, Bernard Shaw ventured a somewhat different interpretation:

Like all great public speakers she was a born actress. She was successively a Puseyite Evangelical, an Atheist Bible Smasher, a Darwinian Secularist, a Fabian Socialist, a Strike Leader, and finally a Theosophist, exactly as Mrs. Siddons was Lady Macbeth, Lady Randolph, Beatrice, Rosalind, and Volumnia. She "saw herself" as a priestess above all: that was how Theosophy held her to the end. There was a different leading man every time: Bradlaugh, Robertson, Aveling, Shaw, and Herbert Burrows. That did not matter.

Whoever does not understand this, as I, a playwright, do, will never understand the career of Annie Besant.²⁶

Annie's most recent biographer agrees that she saw herself as a religious figure—especially as a Christian martyr. (She thought she may have been Giordano Bruno in an earlier incarnation.) But Dr. Nethercot attaches considerably more importance to the roles of the "leading men", in large measure justifying Foote's postulation. He adds further to the cast of characters Charles Voysey, Thomas Scott, Moncure Conway, the "masculine Helena Blavatsky", and, in India, Gyanendra Chakravarti and Charles W. Leadbeater. There is no suggestion that in her Theosophical career she had love affairs in any physical sense, but rather that she constantly required the stimulation of masculine attachments as a source for her remarkable energies. Certainly the early endearments between her and Mme. Blavatsky were such that the lesbian overtones can hardly be overlooked.

No doubt the power struggle within the Theosophical Society in the years following Blavatsky's death challenged her full energies. She went to the United States twice in the following two years. In the twelve months ending June 1893, she had made 223 lectures. During four months in India in 1894 she lectured 121 times. By 1895 she had taught herself enough Sanskrit to translate (with some help) the *Bhagavad Gita* into *The Lord's Song*. Throughout her long life she kept up an almost continuous commutation between Adyar and London, and one can only speculate that the long sea voyages offered some respite from the crowds and battles which always surrounded her.

She had fallen heir to the voluminous notes of HPB, a circumstance which gave her strong leverage in shaping the future of the Society. But the true Blavatskyites were unhappy with the Besant edition of the third and fourth volumes of *The Secret Doctrine*. They had been edited and "purged" to conform with Annie's own views, or so it was claimed. As with every other heretical organization of the times the conservative forces ("Back to Blavatsky") and the liberal pressures of adjustment could not avoid open warfare. As with the other movements, too, the nature of the cleavage was largely determined by personalities. By all odds the most controversial character in the Besant camp was Charles W. Leadbeater, originally a curate in the Church of England. In 1883 he had given up home, family, and friends to accompany Mme. Blavatsky back to India and to become a Theosophist and a Buddhist. He was a skilled teacher and an effective speaker. In the post-Blavatsky days Annie Besant came to depend on him a great deal, and made him Assistant Secretary of the European Section. Characteristically she remained loyal to him and his memory remains "enshrined" at Adyar.

Leadbeater was particularly successful in the United States and Canada, where Annie needed support. In Chicago overflow crowds were turned away at his lectures in Steinway Hall. But the attractive and gentle ex-curate was a homosexual, and his behaviour with his young disciples was eventually disclosed by shocked parents. The Society itself put him on trial in London in the spring of 1906. Annie remained in India. The evidence was all against him. Leadbeater himself was quite humble and frank. He had been, he said, in a former incarnation an ancient Greek,

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with a different attitude towards sexual standards than the Edwardians. He was asked to resign and did so, but Annie took him back into her own advisory circle, where he remained, in spite of the liability he represented in public relations, for the scandal could not, of course, be confined within the organization.

But Annie Besant's personal popularity did not dim. At the time of Olcott's death in 1907 the Masters appeared both to him and to her urging her to "take up the burden". Consequently in a one-sided election she added the title of President to her existing authority. White-haired now, and often in a white sari, she was never far from London in the early part of the century. She retained the power to fill Queen's Hall, or City Temple, or Royal Albert Hall, sometimes lecturing for the general public, sometimes specifically for Theosophists. Her series on *The Changing World* (1908) was published both in book form and in the *Christian Commonwealth*. Standing ovations before and after her speeches were commonplace. In 1911 at the Sorbonne she was invited to speak in French on Giordano Bruno ("Theosophy's Apostle in the Sixteenth Century"). She addressed a capacity audience of 4,000 with stirring success.

Annie Besant lived till 1933 and, except for the war years, she visited London almost annually. Those who wish to follow her adoption of the Christ-like young Krishnamurti as the World Teacher, and her involvement with the Indian National Congress—her differences with Gandhi and her influence on Nehru—will have to continue elsewhere, for these matters extend beyond the present canvas, both in time and place. As Dr. Nethercot has suggested by his apt titles, Annie lived many lives.

It is difficult to resist saying, however, that the longer she lived the more traditionally Christian became her tone and her imagery. So long ago as 1895 she wrote from India to sympathize with a co-worker's troubles,

. . . especially since you are surrounded by those who are going against us. But these times of sifting must come to all who seek to trod the path. . . . Alas! that so many should fall. But you, dear brother, I hope to greet once more, unshaken, and being only the stronger for the trial.²⁷

Even then the Pauline overtones are evident. She was, at the

end, farther from the substance and the spirit of Charles Bradlaugh than she was from the orthodoxy of the Sibsey parish which she fled.

Public excitement over Theosophy and its newsworthy *personae* did not entirely substitute for less organized experiments in Spiritism which have continued ever since. William T. Stead's activities in occult matters deserve a few paragraphs, not because they are markedly different or more interesting than hundreds of others, but because Stead himself played such a significant role in the shaping of his times, and anything he did was highly publicized. He has already criss-crossed these pages a number of times and will continue to do so. He was an editor—some would say the first of the “yellow journalists”—who came to wield great power over public opinion. He was also a man of boundless enthusiasms for such seemingly disparate causes as the Russian refugees, the Salvation Army, pacifism, the British Navy, Cecil Rhodes, and Spiritualism.

He picked up Spiritualism from a Mark Fooks, a north-country journalist, in about 1880, but it was another ten years before he launched his most publicized Spiritualist experiment. Stead was the son of a Congregationalist minister, and although he was anything but orthodox in his habits of worship he never repudiated his childhood faith. He had the kind of mind that could accept all religions as simultaneously true, and could refer to God without embarrassment as the “Senior Partner”. His editing of *Real Ghost Stories* in 1891 helped convince him of the reality of spirit forces acting in the world.

His own means of spirit communication was by “automatic hand-writing”. He did not use a planchette.

I can, after making my mind passive, place my pen on paper, and my hand will write messages from friends at a distance; whether they are in the body or whether they have experienced that change called death, makes no difference.²⁸

In the case of living “senders” he was able to verify such thought-transference, though frequently, he confessed, there were some elements of error.

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In 1890 Julia A. Ames, an American girl, visited Stead on her first trip to Europe *en route* to see the Passion Play. He gave her his book on Oberammergau (*The Story that Transformed the World*), and on her return she stopped again at his Wimbledon home and met the family. She was a devout Methodist, not a Spiritualist. He never saw her again. She died shortly afterwards.

Back in Illinois, Julia's bosom companion (referred to merely as "Ellen" or "Miss E") twice recognized the form of Julia at her bedside. She spoke to the spirit, but got no reply. Having heard of Stead's handwriting experiments, she journeyed to England to ask him to try to get in touch with her lost friend. Apparently Stead had no trouble doing so. His hand wrote messages which, he claimed, made no sense for him, yet were perfectly intelligible to Ellen, who recognized the persons mentioned and other references in the context of former associations. But Stead was soon communicating with Julia not as an intermediary but on his own, establishing a spirit-friendship which continued, presumably, until Stead himself crossed the "Borderland".

As recorded in the *Annales des Sciences Psychiques* (1909, xix, 110), this would be the nature of some of the communications:

W. Stead in presence of Mrs. R. wrote automatically (nominally from Julia) that Mrs. R. had had a fall and injured her spine. Mrs. R. denied this, but Julia (by the hand of Stead) wrote, "She has forgotten; it was seven years ago at Streaton in Illinois; there was snow. On reaching Mrs. Buell's house, Mrs. R. slipped on the edge of the pavement, fell, and hurt her back." Then Mrs. R. remembered the incident, which she had completely forgotten.²⁹

By 1897 he had sufficient quantity of correspondence to publish a slim volume, *Letters from Julia*. This was reissued, with additional letters, as *After Death* in 1905. The book continued its popularity after Stead's death in the *Titanic* disaster of 1912, and through World War I. With Miss A. M. Goodrich-Freer (later Mrs. H. H. Spoer) he edited the psychical periodical *Borderland* from 1894 to 1897. He declined, however, Julia's

suggestion that he found a "Bureau" for the interchange of information between the living and the dead. This, he told her, would have to be left to those who had more time.

Stead did some experimenting, too, with spirit photography—forms that appeared inexplicably on photographic plates. There was the particular studio of an uneducated photographer, Mr. Bournsell, who seemed as mystified as anyone else at the shadows that occasionally appeared to ruin his best work. Stead protected Bournsell's anonymity at the photographer's own request. The name was later supplied by Stead's daughter and biographer, Estelle. Estelle, also a convinced Spiritualist, assures us that her father used his own camera and equipment as well as Bournsell's in verifying the existence of the invisible wraith-like forms.

The editor's beloved son, Willie Stead, who was to have been his father's successor, died at the age of thirty-three in 1908. Thereafter Stead corresponded with both Willie and Julia on about a weekly basis. In support for his claims Stead pointed to his success at communicating with living persons at a distance on verifiable matters, and to Julia's foretelling of happenings, but these were only partially correct at best. Indeed Julia seemed often as fallible as any mortal and did not lay claim to omniscience. Then Stead noted "the strongly marked and unvarying personal idiosyncrasy of the writer of these Letters, which is certainly not my own—is, I am afraid, very much superior to my own."³⁰ But the style of Julia does not appear to be unacceptably different from Stead's talking to himself. His biographer, Whyte, agrees that at least some of the messages "seem to present merely a distorted dreamlike reflection of the workings of Stead's own brain".³¹

Stead, of course, though constantly in the midst of the great personalities of his day, was himself no giant intellect, and we should not be surprised at finding a kind of *naïveté* in his confrontation with Spiritualism. He says, for instance, that he is positive that the Letters do not proceed from his conscious mind.

Of my unconscious mind, I am, of course, unconscious. But I can hardly imagine that any part of my unconscious self would deliberately practise a hoax upon my conscious self about the

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most serious of all subjects, and keep it up year after year with the utmost apparent sincerity and consistency.³²

But the post-Freudians tell us that this is almost the precise function of our unconscious.

Then, too, he could not resist the journalistic aspect of the spirit world, and actually had Willie contact the shade of Alfred Tennyson to relay a posthumous poem. Not surprisingly the great editor could get no support for the poem from any Tennyson scholars to whom he sent it.

The spirit world as seen by Stead, with the help of Julia and Willie, is replete with the most hackneyed images of Non-conformist Christianity. The angel who took Julia through the streets and in the air was all robed in white, actually had wings, and behaved for all the world like one of the ghosts in Dickens's *Christmas Carol*. The spirit revelations are almost always variations on the theme that God is Love. Their advice is to "read the Bible more and Remember The Lord Liveth". Unlike the spirits in Theosophy, Stead's Borderland acquaintances are all apparently white, Anglo-Saxon, and fundamentally Christian. They are very like, in fact, the people of his childhood.

Nevertheless Stead felt some need to check with more expert advice on the matter of visualizing spirits, and turned to his old friend, Mrs. Besant. Annie happened to be, at that time, in the United States, so he got in touch instead with C. W. Leadbeater, "to whom Mrs. Besant told me I could refer any questions upon which I wanted advice in her absence".³³ To Leadbeater he relayed Julia's advice on how to get in direct touch with spirits: i.e., be alone, be quiet, sit down (not lie down) comfortably, etc. Leadbeater thought this advice quite proper and workable. However he personally would have specified more "severe moral training . . . I have been taught to attach more importance than she does to celibacy, vegetarianism, and abstinence from alcohol." We must assume that Stead received this advice before the scandal that threw some doubt on Leadbeater's own moral qualifications.

The Society for Psychical Research continued to record far more convincing experiences than those recounted by William T. Stead, but none were more widely circulated. It would be

improper to form a judgment of this many-faceted and energetic reformer on the basis of these experiences alone. His spirit-correspondence probably represented for him precious moments of calm snatched from the stormiest of careers. Stead was not really a heretic, for he seemed always entirely willing to think of himself within the framework of Christian orthodoxy—though he was often highly critical of the churches. It ought to be possible in a Christian country, he thought, to stop the first person on the street and ask for sympathy or help. And no one could doubt that any stranger who stopped Stead would receive both sympathy and help in good measure. He was rather a catalyst who, by constantly keeping the Establishment off balance, helped heresies to flourish. As such he deserves at least minimal attention later in these pages.

III

THE NEW CHRISTIANS

1 Christians in a Changing World

The Christian Church took a long time to adjust to the new world, sociologically as well as theologically. Some will say it has never caught up with the real world; but the more significant observation would surely be that, ponderous as it was, entrenched as it was, it began at long last to move with the times. Not all of it moved, there was little agreement as to speed or direction, and it required at times Herculean prodding, but it has so far escaped being buried. The new Christians in and about London played an exciting, sometimes heroic, counterpoint to their struggling brothers outside the faith. Often, indeed, they must have felt in closer sympathy with godless reformers than with their orthodox prelates.

The Churches in London, and in all the large manufacturing towns, were not in a favourable position for dealing with social or intellectual revolution. They talked about "losing" the working classes, but the evidence is, says K. S. Inglis, that they never had them. Church-going was part of the normal life pattern in rural England, but in the rapid urbanization of the mid-century, working people found themselves in an environment where church attendance was specifically upper middle class. The pew-renting system, for instance, often made attendance awkward for the poor, even though it may not have been a major factor in keeping working men away.¹

Part of the problem was simply a lack of clergymen. When England had a ten million population in 1811, there were 16,000 clergy. By the 1870s the population had considerably more than doubled, but the number of clergy had risen only to 19,000. By 1883 the acknowledged shortage was placed at 2,500. Many of them were underpaid. Half of them received less than 200 pounds

a year in the 1880s. When help was forthcoming it went to the beneficed clergy, not to the curates, even though the ratio of curates to incumbents kept increasing.² The Church of England voted substantial sums to build new churches and increase benefices in the populous areas, but charges among the poor were not popular. The earlier attitude of most of the clergy toward the Reform Bill in 1831 and the Charter in 1839 had not established good relationships between the Church and the poor. Only the Roman Catholics made notable gains among the working class, helped by the waves of Irish immigration during the potato famine, and the conversions of Newman and Manning.

Influenced by the early success of the Salvation Army, both Anglicans and Nonconformists made belated, though sometimes vigorous, efforts to found missions and settlements. The Church of England Working Men's Society (1876) never really became what its name implied. The Church Army (1882) had sixty labour and lodging houses in the big towns by the end of the century. Among the Nonconformists the Pleasant Sunday Afternoons (1875), with their motto of "Brief, Bright, Brotherly", attracted some who would not otherwise have come to a place of worship. The Afternoons were secular in character except for a short prayer and a few hymns. The main feature was almost always an address by a prominent layman on some subject with a humanitarian slant. Authors, travellers, politicians, journalists, and propagandists all found new sources of Sunday employment. The Pleasant Sunday Afternoons had a definitely liberal cast. Few conservatives were asked to speak, but the Socialists were kept busy. The historian, Ensor, feels that the rising labour movement of the day owed much to the open church doors of Nonconformity.³

The dates are of interest, for they show these efforts to be a full decade behind the Secularist movements. In 1883, nevertheless, Randall Davidson (later to be Archbishop of Canterbury) discounted the influence of Secularism on the failure of the Churches. He reasoned that the numbers present at all the Secularist halls in London on any given Sunday would not equal the congregation of many a single parish church, and that the advertised names of Secularist lecturers numbered only about a half dozen. His dismissal was perhaps too cavalier. The Brad-

laugh audiences in particular were real working men—the people the Church had singularly failed to attract. Furthermore the news of Secularist battles, and occasional successes, in courts of law and in Parliament must have made their position far more acceptable than it would have been a generation before. The Secularist movement had given “status” to the non-churchgoer.

The difference between a “mission” and a “settlement” was never very clear. The Oxford-inspired settlements of Toynbee Hall and Oxford House were primarily educational centres in working-class areas. Residents were expected to serve on Boards, give legal advice, manage schools, direct recreation, or build up libraries. They were laymen with a clerical head. The missions were largely a means of social rescue work—providing food, clothing, shelter, medical aid, and solace to the destitute. But the labels tended to become synonymous, and both were judged by later reformers to be reactionary in their philanthropic outlook and insufficiently revolutionary in their aims.

When we consider the obstacles to any revitalization of the Church in the large industrial cities, it becomes suddenly less remarkable that it should have begun to take up its challenges feebly and late, than that it should have found clergymen qualified and willing to face them. Such clergymen did exist, and they existed largely within the Establishment. Conway, as an American on the London religious scene, was surprised and pleased to find that the English clergyman was so intellectually independent. Of course he had to subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles, but his parishioners were no more affected by the creeds and formulas than if they had been in Latin. He may have been appointed to his living by some nobleman, but short of provable immorality or heresy he could criticize his bishop or the government or the nobleman himself and remain secure in his living. Even for immorality or heresy he had the right of a trial before a court.

This security, though often linked with a most modest income, permitted laziness and inefficiency and what dissenters called “worldliness” in the Anglican clergy. It also permitted strong independence of mind and action. The Anglican clergy, by the very reason of its worldliness, was saved from the excesses of the Puritans, who burnt works of art and built

“chapels that were models of ugliness”. It was the English Church that retained the beauty and culture developed by earlier centuries. Thus Conway, himself an outsider and a heretic, did not support Disestablishment, and expressed general admiration for the type of clergyman the Church produced.⁴

As evidence of their independence, and in the face of the anti-clericalism of Robert Owen, a handful of clergymen felt free to support Co-operation—essentially a secular movement—from the beginning. It is necessary to recall that the Co-operative movement began as quite a different venture than the one into which it developed. In present-day Britain it is estimated that one out of every five persons has membership in a Co-operative Society. These societies have profits high in the millions of pounds per annum, with investments in farms, factories, and shipping. The movement has had an influence on Britain’s way of life, certainly, but is not now looked upon as a harbinger of the ideal society. But William King, a forerunner of the Rochdale pioneers said, “When a man enters a Co-operative Society he enters upon a new relation with his fellow men; and that relation immediately becomes a subject of every sanction, both moral and religious.” One of the original Rochdale “laws” included the statement that “as soon as practicable, this society shall proceed to arrange the powers of production, distribution, education, and government, or in other words to establish a self-supporting home colony of united interest, or assist other societies in establishing such colonies.”⁵

Even in 1830 there were 266 societies with 20,000 adherents, but the movement was on the wane, and it needed G. J. Holyoake to give it new life. In 1843 he lectured on self-help to the weavers of Rochdale and the following year they opened their famous Toad Lane Store, “the cradle of the gigantic Co-operative organization of modern times”.⁶ In 1846 the Friendly Societies Act gave some protection to their funds. Complete legal security came in 1852 with the Industrial and Provident Societies Act.

But long before such governmental acceptance was dreamed of, the real fervour of the Co-operators was for a communistic society. “They had no idea of founding a race of grocers, but a race of men,” Holyoake records. Robert Owen in particular

looked towards Co-operation as a means of establishing self-supporting industrial cities, controlled by the workers, who would share the wealth equitably and live in brotherhood.⁷ This kind of idealism was more adaptable to the countryside and the small towns than to the cities. Beatrice Potter, between 1883 and 1889, enacted a "pious fraud", and pretended to be a Miss Jones visiting the country folks in Bacup, Lancashire, with her old nurse, Martha Mills. She found there an almost complete absence of class spirit, with the life of the village revolving around the twin hubs of the Chapel and the Co-op. There was a subtle competition between the two, but it seemed to be accepted that the Co-op should furnish amusement, some education, and the security of a mutual insurance company.⁸ Amid the growing industry of the cities, however, the commercial aspects more and more overshadowed the moral and social aims. Co-operation became an end in itself rather than the gateway to the communal state. By the 1870s the real utopians had found their arenas elsewhere—in political and revolutionary societies.

The first Christian Socialists active in the Co-operative movement were Frederick Denison Maurice, Charles Kingsley, J. M. Ludlow, Thomas Hughes, and E. Van-Sittart Neale. By 1880 Holyoake complained that the movement had been "captured" by the Christians. Perhaps too comfortable in the martyr's role, Holyoake, late in life, felt that he had been eased out of the organization because his Secular position came to be embarrassing to the new leaders. (He was not, for instance, invited to the Rochdale Jubilee in 1892.)⁹ More likely, if there was embarrassment, it arose from the fact that Co-operation had departed from the path Holyoake wished it to take; but in this respect he could have been no more disappointed than were his early Christian Socialist colleagues, all of whom continued to support a more equal distribution of profits than that based on the amount of purchases—the so-called Rochdale plan. Neale especially gave much of his life to a Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations—associations in which the workers or craftsmen would share ownership. Such sharing of profit with labour was, for Holyoake, "the noblest aspiration of the pioneers". But the successful Co-operatives were those which shared the profits of distribution, not those which shared ownership of production.

For Co-operation to lead to Utopia the two would, of course, have to dovetail neatly. In 1854 Neale's organization came to an end, leaving him personally impoverished. As late as 1888 we find him pleading for a more "moralized distribution" and even for "moralized production". But as a socially utopian movement, Co-operation was all but abandoned in 1854.

The same idealists were for the most part supporters of "the Charter" of the Working Men's Association as well. Like Co-operation, Chartism was regarded at the time as revolutionary, though most of its six points were eventually adopted without any thought of violence. Its six points (in brief) called for universal suffrage, annual Parliaments, voting by ballot, equal electoral districts, payment for Members of Parliament, and the abolition of property qualifications for membership in Parliament. Unlike the Co-operative movement, however, the Chartist agitation under Feargus O'Connor was stormy and sometimes violent, and it collapsed as a movement in 1848. Kingsley wrote the placard which summoned a great procession in support of the Charter which, by then, was said to have acquired five million signatures, many of which turned out to be fictitious. Fearing violence the authorities forbade the march, and the great day (11 April) had to be tamely celebrated by orderly speeches to a few thousand at Kennington Common. Though both Chartism and Co-operation failed their primary purposes, their ideals had found some persuasive spokesmen.

In response to Ludlow's observations that Socialism would have to be Christianized or it could topple Christianity, Maurice replied, "The necessity of an English theological reformation, as the means of averting an English political revolution and of bringing what is good in foreign revolutions to know itself, has been more and more pressing upon my mind."¹⁰ Maurice was a Professor of English Literature and History at King's College, London, from which he was ousted in 1846 for unorthodox views expressed in his *Theological Essays*. Later in his life he became Professor of Moral Theology at Cambridge. He had started his career as a Unitarian, but moved to the Established Church because he found the doctrine of Incarnation to be central in his beliefs. Whatever else one may say of him he must be regarded as an enormously successful teacher. Moncure Conway speaks

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of "the pure face and earnest eyes . . . the lofty brow and halo of white hair". Conway longed to hear him laugh—but did not. He noted that in Ford Madox Brown's painting, "Work", Maurice looks on sadly though Carlyle is laughing. Stephen Winsten (in *Salt and his Circle*) saw a humble man who really listened to his students. All Christian Socialism in England was to bear his mark.

Maurice is usually credited as being the first to use the term, Christian Socialism, but Holyoake claimed it was used in the *New Moral World* as early as 1840.¹¹ In any case, Maurice's definition would hardly have satisfied the militant Socialists of the 80s and 90s: "Anyone who recognizes the principle of co-operation as a stronger and truer principle than that of competition has a right to the honour or the disgrace of being called a Socialist."¹² Socialism was simply "the assertion of God's order". Furthermore a truly social democracy would be unthinkable without a Church, a Queen, and the gentry.

Not everyone liked the term. E. Van-Sittart Neale thought it a mistake, tending to alienate on the one hand the Christians who mistrusted Socialism, and on the other the Socialists who did not want to align themselves with the Church. Maurice issued a series of *Tracts on Christian Socialism* before 1850, but neither the name nor the movement caught hold of the times. As G. J. Holyoake reminds us,

some good words, like some good persons, get banished and pass as it were a generation in exile. Then there arise persons who, knowing nothing or caring nothing for the old hateful controversial connotations of the word, are struck by its simple fitness and recall it.¹³

That is what happened to Christian Socialism. For by the time Maurice reached the end of his life (1872), his students—notably his most enthusiastic disciple, Stewart Headlam—were reviving the notion of a socially conscious Church in a manner that was to leave the entire concept of Christianity permanently altered.

It must be said of Maurice that though his Socialism was a rather simple prototype of what the movement became in the following generation, his theology was genuinely liberal. He

was repelled by the idea that mankind was essentially depraved or that he was threatened with eternal damnation. His views of heaven and hell as being co-existing states reflecting, respectively, union with or separation from Christ would still be considered liberal (though no longer heretical) today.

To men and women who would never read his books on theology, Maurice extended his influence through the Working Men's College which he founded in 1854. It was modelled on King's College and University College, London, and as an educational break-through it was of great significance, even though, as Frederic Harrison observed, the clientele turned out to be more bourgeois than proletarian. For a time a most distinguished faculty gave their energies without compensation to this idealistic enterprise. Maurice remained its president even during his professorship at Cambridge (1866) until his death. He was succeeded by Thomas Hughes.

The heresy trial of the Rev. Charles Voysey has been already noted. It challenged many clergymen—and laymen as well—to re-examine their views on the Original Sin, Atonement, the Divinity of Jesus, the validity of the miracles, and the authenticity of Biblical sources. Many a faithful churchman must have felt that Voysey was indeed no more of a heretic than he.

Stopford A. Brooke was one of these. A well-educated Dubliner who had trod the customary path to London, he had been chaplain to the British embassy in Berlin, and had published a *Life and Works of Milton*. In contrast to Voysey he voluntarily withdrew from the Church of England in spite of urgent requests that he remain. "Could James Martineau be Archbishop of Canterbury?" he is said to have asked. "No? Then the Church is no place for me."¹⁴ Brooke retained his claim to being a Christian. Yet he seemed to adopt an increasingly familiar double standard of truthfulness: What is true in theology has a kind of poetic licence and need not necessarily be true as science. As we look back upon his beliefs in *Faith and Freedom*,¹⁵ the reasoning seems, perhaps, too facile. Like most of the rebellious clergymen who followed him, he made the connection between a liberal theology and Socialism, and in later years was a member of the Fabian Society. Significantly, he published a memorial sermon on the *Life and Work of Maurice*.

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After the beginning of the decade of the eighties it required less moral heroism for a clergyman to declare himself a Socialist, though the career of Stewart Headlam, as we shall see, was far from placid. The lists of the Fabian Society for 1894, for example, contain twenty-five "reverends", and this must be taken as indication of a more sweeping trend, since the Fabians were by then a select group of militant workers. About 100 ministers identified themselves with the Christian Socialist Guild of St. Matthew. By the time of the Christian Social Union, Socialism became very nearly respectable.

Christian Socialism did not, as on the Continent, develop into a political party—partly, no doubt, because the influential Fabians adopted the policy of working primarily through existing organizations. It is a little difficult to say, therefore, exactly what the "platform" of Christian Socialism was. Nevertheless there seemed to be considerable unanimity among Christian Socialists in support of land reform, reform of the Poor Laws, and the strengthening of Co-operation and trade unionism. On matters concerning their Secular brethren they found themselves torn two ways. Should they commend Justice North for his stiff sentence of G. W. Foote for his ridiculing of Christian beliefs in *The Freethinker*? *The Christian Commonwealth* sides with the Justice, *The Christian Socialist* with Foote. Similarly, in Bradlaugh's troubles with Parliament—could a Christian, even an advanced Socialist one, approve of admission of the militant Atheist to the halls of Parliament? Most of them did, making sure to dissociate themselves from Bradlaugh's religious views.

On the perennial issue of Disestablishment, the Christian Socialists also displayed some ambiguity. They could come to substantial agreement on *disendowment*, assuming that under Socialism all large landholdings, including those of the Church, would be returned through the Government to the people. In 1893 Percy Dearmer, then on the Executive Committee of the Fabian Society, suggested that Disestablishment, *per se*, was too emotional an issue to be met head on, and should go on piecemeal. He pointed out that many of the distasteful privileges of Churchmen had already been removed, and that, in turn, the Coronation Service could be abolished, the powers of Ecclesiastical Courts reduced, appointments of deans and bishops be

made democratic, and so on, until Disestablishment could be said to have been achieved.¹⁶

Christian Socialists were among the prime movers of the controversial Twentieth-Century New Testament, a translation meant not for intellectuals but for the masses. The movement for the new version received initial impetus from the vigorous editor, William T. Stead, who brought together Ernest Malan and Mary Higgs (wife of a Congregationalist minister) to work on the project. Contributors to the work included E. D. Girdlestone, formerly a curate, a Christian Socialist of the Birmingham Fabian Society, and Henry Bazett, also a former clergyman, Socialist, and trade unionist. The result was that when the new Scriptures appeared in 1898—and in revised versions thereafter—they were looked upon by many (perhaps properly) as having revolutionary potential.

But possibly the more useful function of Christian Socialist publications and sermons was in the less specific area of keeping consciences aroused about inequities and injustices: the child of twelve who reported herself to the workhouse with the result that her father, unemployed, was sentenced to thirty days of hard labour . . . The Duke of Buccleuch, who refused to let the towing path for barges spoil his lawn along the river above Richmond Bridge (at one of his eight palaces), so that the barges must always be cast loose, and the horses led up into the town and around to the other side of the estate.¹⁷ In these reminders some of the Christian clergy found themselves a place in the reform movement. These indefatigable churchmen imparted the flavour of religious idealism to the rising Socialist movement, so different from the anti-religious spirit of Socialism on the Continent.

That was one reason why visitors from abroad found the religious flavour of the social revolution in England unique. Eduard Bernstein, the German Socialist, was forced to live for some twelve years in England. His longest stay in London began in 1888. His original connections were with Marx and Engels, but he came to know the entire Socialist society of the city. He was most impressed by the clergymen-Socialists. He noted in what esteem the workers of London held such ministers as Percy Dearmer and William A. Morris (the Rev. Morris of St.

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Ann's Vicarage, South Lambeth, not, of course, the artist and author of *News from Nowhere*). Bernstein very accurately judged Stewart Headlam to be the most influential of the rising young Socialist clergy. He observed, by the way, that none of these people looked like or sounded like a pastor—at least not like the German conception of one. On the other hand, the man who would have easily been mistaken for a solid evangelistic clergyman back home was Charles Bradlaugh.¹⁸

Bernstein was a Socialist who was struck by the religiosity of the London movement. A decade later his countryman, Emil Fuchs, arrived as a theological student to be impressed by the social action of churchmen. Fuchs' observations were actually of Manchester, but they probably do not differ essentially from what he would have perceived in any of the industrial English cities at the end of the century. He found social turbulence in all the churches, from the Salvation Army on the one hand to the Church of England on the other. He found a surprising amount of democracy in the churches too, where a Lloyd George might sit next to a labourer. (This, Fuchs said, he would have expected in the United States, but not in England.) The Nonconformist pastors had surprising freedom to deal with social and political problems. And they often did so at the risk of alienating their rich parishioners and losing an essential part of their income. But even some of the wealthy supported this new breed of clergymen, to the point of having contributed to the relief of the strikers at the London docks.

This was strange enough to a young German student abroad. Much stranger were the goings-on within the Church of England itself. Working out of a seaman's mission in the slums Fuchs met a young Anglican clergyman devoted to high-church ritual. This young man was apparently equally sincere in his administering of the sacraments and in his ardour for social revolution.

Fuchs found a great paradox on the English scene—one which he was to rediscover in later life in the entire Western world. He found the sincerely responsible people more evident in England than in Germany; but he found English politics more blatantly governed by self-seeking and the profit motive. The Empire, he concluded, was made possible only by people of an essentially moral outlook, out of which others made profit and

sport. It was an observation that was bound to temper his admiration of English Christian Socialism.¹⁹

Despite their swelling ranks, the Christian Socialists continued to be, after all, a tiny segment of the English Church—Established and Nonconformist together. Orthodoxy, while learning a kind of toleration, still insisted that Christianity and Socialism were semantically irreconcilable. "Religion would make the love of Christ the spring of human effort; Socialism makes the force of central authority the lever of social action."²⁰ Still Ausubel feels that the biggest single influence that motivated reform was religion. Henry George found that he could not divorce social reform from religious regeneration.²¹ And even the Marxist, H. M. Hyndman, came to be convinced that religious "prejudices" were stronger in England than he had anticipated, and that the substitution of Socialism for religion was premature. In his old age he had sadly to confess that some form of religious belief would be necessary for hundreds of years yet, and would have to be provided for the people somehow.²²

The most candid attempt to substitute Socialism for religion—John Trevor's "Labour Church"—was, as we have already observed, a complete failure in London. Trevor was a liberal Unitarian minister and a devoted Socialist, but could not accept Christian Socialism as a movement. "When priests and people lay their heads together to achieve Socialism," he said, "only God and a whole army of martyrs will be able to drag poor humanity out of the mess they make." His severest opponent, not surprisingly, was the Warden of his old church, Edward Van-Sittart Neale, the gentle old Christian Socialist and Co-operator whom Trevor regarded as "a Trinitarian and a Tory".²³

By the eighties it was no longer shocking or unusual for clergymen to be speaking from their pulpits, and writing in pamphlets and books, about the affairs of this world "in the light of the Incarnation". Church conferences began to devote sessions to topics that were suspected of being more sociological than theological. Though the Œcumenical Methodist Conference meeting in London in 1881 gave only a single hour out of its twelve days to temporal problems, the English Church Conference gave one of its four days to such discussion. Simul-

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taneously in London the International Freethought Congress was presided over by Dr. Ludwig Büchner and attracted the interest of the near-by Church Conference. With the co-operation of Dean Arthur Penrhyn Stanley ("the Broad Church Dean") Jerusalem Chamber in the Abbey was opened for the Hibbert Lectures in 1880, which were delivered by the French apostate, Ernest Renan.²⁴

Still the spiritual children of Frederick Denison Maurice never found a London leader around whom they all could rally; and they never established a lasting organizational movement. They came closest in the person of Stewart Headlam and in his Christian Socialist Guild of Saint Matthew.

2 The New Anglicans

Stewart Headlam was in continuous trouble with his bishops. For eleven years in the prime of his life he was not allowed a curacy, and would not have had a pulpit from which to preach at all except for such clergyman friends as W. E. Moll, who occasionally invited him to officiate at St. Mary's, Soho. Both J. Jackson, and his successor as Bishop of London, Frederick Temple, were obdurate. Headlam had to wait until nearly the end of the century and the accession of Mandell Creighton before the ban was lifted and he was given a general licence for the diocese on 28 January 1898.

Of what was the vigorous young priest guilty? The bishops could have compiled a list: 1, Defence of, and apparent friendship for Charles Bradlaugh, G. W. Foote, Oscar Wilde, and sundry other Atheistic or decadent Londoners. 2, His chairmanship of the Science classes for the Secularists in Old Street. 3, Socialist political activities, particularly his open support for abolishing the House of Lords. 4, The interpretation of the New Testament as a Socialist document. 5, His defence of the Stage—especially of the ballet. And the list could be extended.

Interestingly, it was the last item which caused him the most trouble with the future Archbishop of Canterbury. A deposition from the Church and Stage Guild had audience with Bishop Temple for a solid hour. It included in addition to Headlam and his fellow clergymen, Moll and H. C. Shuttleworth, the actor-director, Ben Greet, and a bevy of dancers. But Temple had been an old Headmaster at Rugby and had observed how the Stage—especially the ballet—had ruined young men of even the best families. “When you have persuaded the ballet dancers to practise their art in proper clothing, the case will be altered,” he told them.

Headlam was guilty also of an intransigent manner and of uncompromising candour both in speech and print. And deeper than this, he was guilty of sedition—the intent to overthrow the Establishment and Society as they were then ordered and substitute a society that could proceed as it was destined towards the Kingdom of Heaven. If the bishops had not been convinced that Stewart Headlam was sincere and competent to pursue such a goal, all his other crimes—even his espousal of ballet girls—would have turned into foibles.

There was, however, evidence that Headlam believed what he preached and wrote, and that he did not stop with words. His chief accomplishments were effected through the organization which he founded on 21 September (Saint Matthew’s Day) 1877—the Christian Socialist Guild of Saint Matthew. It began as a parish guild at St. Matthew’s, Bethnal Green, and was, in Headlam’s own words, “the product of girls with their hair down their backs and callow youths”¹—the beatniks of his own era. The Guild soon outgrew its parochial character, but with Headlam as its permanent Warden it remained essentially sacramental. Its published “objects” deserve more serious consideration than do the pious founding statements of most groups:

- i. To get rid, by every possible means, of the existing prejudices, especially on the part of “Secularists”, against the Church, her sacraments and doctrines, and to endeavour to “justify God to the people”. [a quotation from Charles Kingsley]

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- ii. To promote frequent and reverent worship in the Holy Communion, and a better observance of the teaching of the Church of England, as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer.
- iii. To promote the study of social and political questions in the light of the Incarnation.

This statement was signed by the honorary secretary, Frederick Verinder, who came under Headlam's influence at Bethnal Green, and remained his disciple and chief organizer. Like Bradlaugh, Headlam had great personal magnetism, and either attracted or repelled strongly. Though his superiors in the Church came to regard him as their *enfant terrible* and watched for his next move with dread, his parishioners and colleagues saw in him, for the most part, a man of great warmth and even charm. After he was elected a member of the School Board, he came to School Board soirées and waltzed with the little girls, causing his fellow Socialist, the Rev. Percy Dearmer, to remark, "I wish I had Headlam's lovely manners"²—a sentiment none of his bishops ever echoed.

The Guild began with forty members attending lectures and debates. After thirteen years it had some two hundred members of whom seventy were clergy. In the nineties it reached its peak with 364 members, ninety-nine clergy.³ Headlam's offer to act as surety for Oscar Wilde caused some shocked resignations, and the rolls dropped to about two hundred. It was, in other words, a yeasty organization, notable not for its numbers but for the publicity it gave to its favoured (or unfavoured) causes and for the pressures it brought upon the hierarchy. Since Headlam was officially almost unemployed during much of the heyday of the Guild, he gave most of his energies to it and, in fact, dominated it. The GSM's views were the views of Headlam.

It stood for democracy within the Church as well as Socialism in the larger society. It proposed an elected council in the Church with real authority. ("It is absurd to say Convocation is the voice of the Church; it is hardly the squeak of the Church."⁴) The Guild took stands on educational policy and generally endorsed the positions of its Warden, who was, simultaneously in 1886, a vice-president in the League for Defence of

Constitutional Rights, a member of the Land Reform League and of the National Association for the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. The Guild therefore supported Bradlaugh's right to a parliamentary seat, and opposed the imprisonment of Foote and his colleagues. It carried its views to various Church Congresses. The Guild was tempted to align itself with other Socialist organizations—the Fabians, the Independent Labour Party, the Social Democratic Federation, the Church Socialist League; but it retained its independence until, in 1909, the Warden felt it had become simply another Socialist debating society, and superintended its dissolution.

Headlam's Socialism and his liberal theology were of a piece, and grew more from practical observation than from the contemplation of theory. He grew up at Wavertree (near Liverpool) and at Tunbridge Wells. He was one of four children (born 1847), but by the time he was in college he had lost both parents and a sister. In spite of a rebellion against class consciousness, he thought highly of Eton—so highly that Cambridge fell flat for him except for the presence there of Frederick Denison Maurice, then Professor of Moral Philosophy. Maurice, as Headlam pictured him, was influential through his books, lectures, and sermons, but was not a "popular" teacher. He was shy with students, and only the real disciples attended his lectures or came to his "at homes" to read Aristotle with him. Headlam himself never knew Maurice well as a person, but acknowledged him throughout his life as the font of his own religious thinking.

Headlam secured a curacy, with difficulty, in Drury Lane in 1870. Here he encountered a cross-section of London life, including some actors and dancers who wanted their profession kept secret to protect their reputations among the church members. Headlam had an affinity for theatre people and for artists generally which caused him to be suspect in some Church circles. His ordination was delayed until 1872.

In Bethnal Green, from 1873 to 1878 he was somewhat better supported in his work with the poor and the trade unionists. Here he lived in a working-class dwelling and held classes for young men and women in his own room at night. He circulated his own books. Sometimes they read plays in parts. Sometimes

they went on theatre parties. Soon he was organizing Sunday evening lectures (after church time) at the Commonwealth Club. This was a large gas-lighted hall where the pew-like seats had ledges for mugs of beer. Here men puffed their pipes and ordered beer from attendants during the lectures. In this hall Headlam delivered his controversial speech on "Theatres and Music Halls", which had the misfortune of being printed in *Era* for 7 October 1877, and so found its way to Bishop Jackson and thence to Bishop Temple. It furnished the reason, or at least the excuse, to force Headlam out of Bethnal Green. In the speech he had asked not to have the theatre judged by degraded examples here and there, and he had protested the scorn with which actors and dancers were treated by the Church. But he had also recommended the theatre as a place of life and mirth, and even as a place of worship. Fortunately for Headlam the formation of the GSM allowed him to continue to have a "home" in Bethnal Green.

These associations with working men and poor artists confirmed him in the social Christian doctrine he had adapted from Maurice and Kingsley. Even in their day he knew there were those who objected to the conjunction of the words Christian and Socialism. But Headlam was convinced that Christ's reference to the Kingdom of Heaven was in support of a righteous society on Earth. He pointed out that all Jesus's miracles were secular works—healing the sick, feeding people, subduing nature, and preventing premature death. In fact, Socialism might be thought of roughly as a plan to get rid of premature death altogether. He could find no evidence that Christ considered death as removal to a better place.

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven and all these things shall be added unto you," Headlam translated into, "Live as members of a righteous society, and individually you will benefit." Instead, he said, "we have lived as members of a competing society with the result that few of us are beautifully clothed, and many of us not fed at all." Christ, he reminded his hearers, was not gentle when he denounced those who devoured widows' houses or who made the Sabbath Day dreary. And for Headlam gentility was not always a virtue. Christ's aim was to found a society which could do on a large scale, throughout the

world, the works he had done on a small scale in Palestine. To accomplish this it was the duty of every man and woman to do his share of the world's labour. The equality of all men under a common Father is the real expression of the Sacraments.

If the bishops in their palaces and the parsons in their parishes are often the reverse of leaders in the movement towards social reform, it is the fault of those of us who allow the Church to be fettered by law and its priests to be selected, not by the parishioners, but by an outside patron who may be anybody from a peer to a Newmarket jockey. A Church disestablished and disendowed would be free to live up to the law of her own being. Churchmen should remember that the State, too, is a sacred institution, and they should unite with Socialists of every sort in the endeavour to use the State for the salvation of the masses. A proper programme: complete education of children, an eight-hour day, fair wages, and nationalization of the land.⁵

This was, in essence, Headlam's basic sermon on which he made variations throughout his life. From at least 1875 on he entered into public debate with the Secularists at every chance he got. He met with Bradlaugh, Harriet Law, and Annie Besant. He was the first clergyman of real competence to assay the Secularists with accuracy and respect. However, what he said on these occasions was not in the least reassuring to his bishops. He told the Secularists that their attacks were largely against the Fundamentalists and the Orthodox, and admitted that Christian culture deserved much of the scolding they gave it. But true Christianity was centred in Christ, not necessarily in the Bible; in the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, not in another world. And he avowed that these men in the Hall of Science were nearer to the Kingdom than the followers of Moody and Sankey.

His Socialism was grounded in Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*. He did not "progress" to Karl Marx. He joined the Fabian Society when it was scarcely three years old, and remained a member until his death thirty-eight years later. In the early days the Fabians sometimes met at his house in Upper Bedford Street. He was on the Executive Committee at three different intervals, 1890-91, 1901-2, 1910-11. He helped draw up the "Basis" of the Society which candidates signed for admission. He was not always happy with his Fabian associates, but

they were the only Socialist body that was not condescending to religion or directly opposed to it. Of the aims of the Independent Labour Party Headlam remained suspicious. "What is the meaning of Labour? And of what is it to be independent?" he wanted to know. "Who are the 'workers' for whom the world is? Am I a worker? Is Chamberlain a worker and Balfour? Are my friends the dancers included, and all mothers and teachers and the members of the stock exchange (at better times than the present) and the excellent Publicans?"⁶ As time went on he became restive with the Fabians too, because they failed to treat the Land Question as central to all others. In a lecture to the Fabians in October 1908, he told them: "The Fabian Society consists of Bureaucratic Collectivists and admirers of Mr. Bernard Shaw, and concerns itself with almost every social activity except the tackling of the Land Question."⁷

But Headlam was himself a warm admirer of Shaw, though they never became intimate friends. There has always been speculation about how much of Headlam went into the character of the Christian Socialist clergyman James Mavor Morell in Shaw's *Candida* in 1895, though Shaw took some pains to point out that Morell was closer to Stopford Brooke with touches of Canon Shuttleworth and Fleming Williams. In the early days Shaw used the Guild of Saint Matthew, as he used every other possible opportunity, to practise his public speaking. Many years later, when Headlam was again in relatively good grace with the Bishop of London, Shaw's address to the Guild in Essex Hall on "Some Necessary Repairs to Religion" once more disturbed the delicate equilibrium. No doubt it was inadequately reported, but the statement that "there is no established religion on the earth today in which an intelligent and educated man can believe", was hotly contested by, among others, G. K. Chesterton. The Bishop of London asked for—and got—Headlam's formal repudiation of any of Shaw's statements that were in contradiction to the Christian faith, and at a later meeting of the Guild Headlam made a formal reply to critics of Shaw's speech.⁸ It was obvious that Headlam was not shocked by Shaw. "He believes in the Holy Ghost, and if he says a word against the Son of Man, it is mainly against false conceptions, and it shall be forgiven him."⁹

One of Shaw's recollections was of Headlam's fierce temper and of his resolve to control it, causing him sometimes to go white in public. At Fabian meetings he never spoke directly about religion, but Shaw tried to understand the religious and artistic side of him. Headlam was "mystically Catholic", Shaw felt, "rather than industrially Collectivist".¹⁰

Few others tried to probe the sensitive artistic side of this outspoken and apparently extroverted religious reformer, and it is possible that Headlam did not rightly understand it himself. When, in the midst of his troubles with the Establishment, friends suggested that he might be happier in some Nonconformist sect, he was genuinely shocked. The ritual and Sacraments of high church were more meaningful to him than its creeds. The artistic sensibilities, of which only his intimates could have been aware, were poignantly sharpened by the disaster of his marriage. It was so catastrophic that his biographer, writing only two years after Headlam's death, would not discuss it or even mention the lady's name. She was Beatrice Pennington, only child of an army officer, and the ceremony was performed on 28 January 1878. The marriage lasted "a few years" and ended in painful frustration when it became apparent that Beatrice had a penchant for homosexuality. Afterwards, in good Victorian convention, the marriage was simply not mentioned. Years after all the principals were dead, Shaw mentioned the truth casually in the preface to another man's book.¹¹

After his marriage broke up, in one of his many gestures of generosity, Headlam tried to help a needy woman obtain a large house, and finally found it on his own hands. So he moved his brother with his four children into it and used the remainder himself as a kind of permanent headquarters for his many activities. This was 31 Upper Bedford Place, and it gave him the opportunity to preside and entertain in pleasantly artistic surroundings. His principal friend and adviser in the arts was Selwyn Image, Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford, with whom he argued about art and morality. Headlam never seemed to understand that sexual drives had a quite legitimate place in art, and so was often confused in his defences of the morality of the artistic fringe which so appealed to him. One of the organizations of Upper Bedford Place was the Anti-Puritan League, a short-lived con-

versational group including Image, G. K. Chesterton, and his brother Cecil. The League issued a few pamphlets.

Out of Headlam's friendships at Drury Lane and Bethnal Green emerged one of the most curious of all the organizations spawned in reform-ridden London. On 30 May 1879 the Church and Stage Guild was born. It narrowly escaped being called the Guild of Christ at Cana, but someone properly convinced Headlam that this was too fanciful. Headlam was hon. secretary, Mark Marsden informal chairman. One gathers that meetings had been going on for some time before the founding of the Guild. Membership was divided between the theatrical profession and the clergy. Not all members had the point of view of the Commonwealth Club speech which earlier brought the wrath of the bishops on Headlam's head. Some regarded it as a society to bring about the reform of the stage and remove vulgarity from the arts.

No prudery, however, was reflected in the stated Objects:

To break down prejudice against theatres, actors, music-hall artists etc. by Churchmen; to promote social and religious sympathy between Church and Stage; to promote the performing arts as possibly dedicated to God's service; to establish rights of religious persons to take part in or attend theatrical performances.¹²

They met monthly, sometimes in the foyer of Drury Lane, to hear papers read and to hold "conversaziones"—a favourite word. They held two dances a year at St. James's Hall, after theatre hours—11.30 p.m. to 4.30 a.m. A special effort was made to secure the attendance of those who might consider themselves socially ostracized because of the profession. Moncure Conway, who attended meetings fitfully, was amused to find that the ballet girls all came dressed with a certain prudishness in contrast to the *décolletage* of the clergymen's wives.¹³ He did not remember seeing any leading actors or dramatists there.

A few did come, but they were not the mainstays of the Guild. Henry Irving, as might be expected, snubbed them, though he later agreed with Ben Greet and Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson that the Guild had succeeded in raising the social status of the profession. Playwrights Herman Merivale and Charles Reade

were members. And on such occasions as when Shaw spoke one could find in the audience William Archer, Oscar Wilde, Hubert Bland, Belfort Bax, and May Morris. At other times those who came to meet celebrities were disappointed. Shaw spoke at least three times between 1889 and 1894, on Wagner, on Ibsen, and on "Acting by One Who Does Not Believe in It, or the Place of the Stage in the Fool's Paradise of Art". This last, reported in Headlam's *Church Reformer*, was a foretaste of the Preface to *Man and Superman* in that he scorned those who used art to escape their political, social, and religious duties instead of using art for the purpose of self-realization. Shaw, by the way, claimed he discovered Florence Haydon at the Guild and wrote the part of Mrs. Whitefield in *Man and Superman* for her.

In the first year the Church and Stage Guild secured 470 members—172 theatrical and 91 clergy. Presumably the remainder were merely interested laymen. The stance they took may appear in our own time to be mere shadow-boxing, but the prejudice against the Stage even so recently as eighty years ago was not simply personal, it was institutional. Dean John Oakley, a member of Headlam's Guild, was not exaggerating when he said, "We are . . . engaged in a stand-up fight, not with individuals, or even with authority as authority, but with the dominant class and the characteristic sentiment of the classes which have hitherto ruled the Church of England." Consequently for twenty years the CSG fought bishops, MP's, over-pious editors, or whoever spoke condescendingly about the Stage and its people. "We are not a mission from the Church to the Stage," Headlam kept insisting.

On the contrary we are a Guild, a society of equals. A body of Church people working in different departments of life, who feel that grievous wrong is done to the Church, serious scandal caused to many of our fellow Christians by the attitude for long occupied and still persistently maintained by some "religious" people towards the Stage. . . .¹⁴

After the first spurt of interest membership levelled out and then declined. The Guild faded from sight about 1900. It is hard in retrospect to judge its effectiveness. Certainly "the profes-

sion" has never acknowledged its special debt to Stewart Headlam. Except Shaw. Near the end of Headlam's life Shaw was preparing his collected works for the publisher. In his first novel (*Immaturity*), penned fifty years earlier but never before published, he had written about a dancer he had seen when he first came to London. The dancer had been Pertoldi, but in his novel he had given her the name of Bernardina di Sangallo. Now he wanted to "rescue her from oblivion in a footnote", thought naturally of Headlam, and wrote to see if he could get more information about her. (Actually in publication he restored to the dancer her real name.) He took the occasion to let the clergyman know he remembered across half a century: "You were making efforts in the Church and Stage Guild and at every other opportunity to make people understand that this kind of dancing is a fine art. . . ." ¹⁵ Headlam never lost interest in the theatre and as an elderly man, from 1914 to the end of his life, was president of the London Shakespeare League. Ben Greet, William Poel, and Lillian Baylis were involved in Shakespearean productions sponsored by the League, playing on sceneryless apron-stages for London schoolchildren.

The most unpopular, and therefore perhaps the most courageous action Headlam ever undertook was to go surety for Oscar Wilde during his trials for sodomy in the spring of 1895. He found then, as Bradlaugh and Besant had found in *The Fruits of Philosophy* trials, that Victorians would tolerate challenges to their Government and their Church while retaining some shreds of composure; but a challenge to their sex-ethics precipitated complete panic. As word of Headlam's generous action spread, membership in his various organizations dropped. He had only the slightest acquaintance with Wilde, and had certainly not been one of his supporters. Yet he seemed to sense the tragedy that lay behind the fall of an artist. Probably, too, his brief marriage to a lesbian gave him some understanding of Oscar's plight.

When it was time for Wilde's release from Reading Jail in 1897 arrangements were made for More Adey (a faithful friend) and Headlam to meet him. Headlam was to keep Wilde safe from publicity hounds and angry crowds for a few hours until it was time to get him to a train to Newhaven and a boat for

Dieppe and exile. Wilde was not happy with the plan, and did not seem to realize fully the cost of Headlam's gesture. (He had been threatened with stoning, and a housemaid had fled in horror.) But Headlam carried out the plan faithfully, getting him to Upper Bedford Place before six in the morning, and giving him his first cup of coffee. Oscar, while waiting, conceived the idea of going into a Catholic retreat, and had Headlam make a request for him of the Jesuits in Farm Street. Of course the Jesuits would not accept him on the impulse of the moment, and the erstwhile great wit and playwright felt very rejected indeed.¹⁶ "I like to think of him as I knew him for those six hours on that spring morning," Headlam later wrote, "and to hope that somewhere and somehow the beauty of his character may be garnered and the follies and weaknesses burnt up."¹⁷ Wilde was not wholly ungrateful. Headlam was one of two dozen recipients of presentation copies of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.

One of the chief outlets for the vigorous pastor's energies, especially during the years when he was without a licence to preach, was educational reform. He was elected to the London School Board in 1888, and remained a member as long as the Board existed. This was one of the areas in which the Fabians first made their influence felt, and it served in large measure as a proving ground for later exploits. In the early nineties the power in the fifty-five-man Board swayed back and forth between the progressives and the conservatives. At issue were such questions as the abolition of fees, both in day school and evening classes; acquisition of pianos for musical "drill"; special classes for retarded children; provision of swimming facilities; keeping classes below forty (they sometimes exceeded a hundred); raising teachers' wages; building new buildings; etc. But the overriding issue behind all of these was the religious-secular struggle. To what extent should the Church remain a power in tax-supported schools?

The progressives on the Board, which included for a time Annie Besant, faced rugged opposition. The conservative leader on the School Board from 1885 to 1894 was Rev. J. R. Diggle, who stood squarely for the power of the Church. "Diggleism" was never put completely to rout, but with the elections of 1897 progressives had a dominant control for the first time and

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progress was made on most of the above issues. The London School Board was the first public body to require trade union rates in its contracts. Headlam was appointed chairman of the Evening Classes Committee. Under his aegis attendance at night classes doubled.

The activities of the London School Board were of particular interest to both Socialists and Secularists, and news of the back-and-forth struggle appeared regularly in all their organs—*The Fabian News*, *The National Reformer*, *The Church Reformer* all chronicle the battles. Eventually the problem of teaching religion in the schools so tied up the Board that in 1903 Lord Salisbury's order destroyed it, and its duties were passed on to an already overloaded County Council. The Council always had broad powers outside "the City" which remained its own enclave. In the Council, the Fabians were also busy, and Sidney Webb had worked for the changeover as a possible extension of "municipal socialism" into "the City".¹⁸ This situation placed the two Fabians, Webb and Headlam, at odds. It was unfortunate especially as it cost the London schools Headlam's services for a few years, and left him embittered. In the complex reorganization of county and borough authority that followed in the Ministries of Balfour and Campbell-Bannerman, Headlam was eventually returned to educational work in 1907.

So far we have said nothing of Headlam as an editor and journalist, yet without *The Church Reformer* none of his multiple enterprises could have had the impact and influence they really achieved. Furthermore, since each issue bears his personal imprint, we should have, without it, a very inadequate impression of the man. It ran monthly from January 1882 to 1895. As with his other ventures, Headlam effected its demise when he felt its usefulness was at an end. It never had a large circulation outside the Guild of Saint Matthew, but its influence was certainly felt, and its appearance at the first of every month must have been anticipated with absolute dread by conservative churchmen of all ranks. Headlam could be denied a pulpit; he could not be denied the Press. Perhaps no such outspoken criticism had ever before been known or tolerated within the Establishment.

The Reformer was a continuous exposé of the inner politics of the Church, complete with names and places. For example:

while many incumbents exist on starvation livings, a Canon of St. Paul's gets 1,000 pounds per year, plus an additional 800 pounds, as Chaplain-General of the Army, which might have gone to another practising chaplain. Archdeacon Jennings of Westminster Abbey receives 1,666 pounds from Abbey revenues, plus an additional 300 pounds as Rector of St. John's. There are four benefices for a population of 1,403 with an average church attendance, combined, of 228. There are 4,654 benefices in England with less than 200 pounds per year—a third of these with less than 100 pounds. Yet twenty-three bishops who died earlier in the century had amassed personal property amounting to nearly 70,000 pounds each. The Church is a collection of beggars and bishops. A Curates' Alliance is announced for the removal of such grievances (both Shuttleworth and Headlam on the Executive Council).

Warnings are given to clergymen who think of accepting certain advertised London curacies because "there are certain Vicars in the metropolis, association with whom means a life of agony". *The Reformer* deplores the prejudice voiced against the Stage by the Rev. T. T. Carter in the Ascension Day Service, and the attacks by the Rev. A. Morris (Tynemouth), F. C. Burnand, F. N. Charrington, etc. Public scoldings of this sort appear regularly. Support is given to the Shelley Society's 1886 production of *The Cenci*, denied a licence by the Lord Chamberlain because of its treatment of incest. Space is given regularly to Land Reform, Disestablishment, and a modernist view of the Scriptures. Whole issues are devoted to the riots of 1886 and 1887 and the GSM's part in them. Signed protests from Headlam himself are frequent.

Headlam obviously meant *The Church Reformer* to be the progressive Church's answer to Bradlaugh's *The National Reformer*. (Headlam ceased publication within a year after the demise of the latter.) Just as Bradlaugh's paper went to great pains to achieve the tone of respectability for the Secularist movement, Headlam's journalism was calculated to leave no doubt that there was a radical wing inside the Church.

Headlam was scrupulous about producing the magazine under fair and proper labour conditions. As a result the paper ran at an annual loss of about 110 pounds, which Headlam supplied out of

his own pocket. Here, too, Frederick Verinder was his invaluable assistant. Headlam also used the services of Thomas Hancock, another disciple of Maurice, who contributed about seventy articles to *The Church Reformer*, Hancock, like Headlam, had trouble with his superiors, and was without an appointment from 1875 to 1884, when Shuttleworth made him a lecturer at St. Nicholas Cole Abbey, where he remained until his death in 1903. Hancock was far more scholarly than Headlam and not as fitted to do public battle. During most of his career he managed to support himself by journalism.

Headlam and his Guild of St. Matthew practically forced upon the Church the formation of the Christian Social Union in 1889, a much blander, though eventually much larger union of socially conscious clergy and laymen. The CSU kept its temper, worked thoroughly and methodically, and eventually helped to accomplish some of the reforms to which Headlam had given support. Clergymen who would never have dreamed of associating themselves with Headlam took pride in the CSU's accomplishment. Few of them recognized the fact that the CSU had been prodded into existence out of the embarrassment in which Headlam had placed them by publicly pointing to certain facts and conditions. Most of the facts and conditions had been known to everyone within the Church for years, but progress—perhaps, indeed, survival of the Church—required the hand of a persistently stubborn and courageous churchman to point to them.

The most important distinction to note between the GSM and the Christian Social Union is that the latter was *social*, not "Socialistic". Some of the members belonged to Socialist organizations—there were, of course, many crossovers with the GSM—but most would not go so far. Its stated aims carefully allowed political latitude:

- i. To claim for the Christian law the ultimate authority to rule social practice.
- ii. To study in common how to apply the moral truths and principles of Christianity to the social and economic difficulties for the present time.
- iii. To present Christ in practical life as Living Master and King. . . .¹⁹

Members were expected to pray for the well-being of the Union at Holy Communion and special Feast Days.

Dissenters were excluded from membership because the CSU wanted to help shape the policy of the Church, rather than dissipate its energies in theological differences. Leaders expressed hope, however, for similar organizations in the Non-conformist churches. The CSU considered its primary function to be study and report on social problems. It avoided involvement with political parties. Clearly, in organization, it owed a good deal to the Fabians, but it lacked the Fabian discipline and selectivity of membership. Its central executive committee avoided any notion of a "cult of the individual" which was for the GSM both its strength and its weakness. By 1896 it had a membership of nearly 3,000. By 1903 it had thirty-five branches and affiliated societies overseas.

So sprawling a society was bound to have a right and left wing. The high-church Bishop, Charles Gore, furnished relatively conservative leadership—though the organization itself was always left of centre in the Establishment. Those who were more nearly of Headlam's opinions tended to rally around the Rev. Percy Dearmer.²⁰ Between these poles what could such an organization do?

It could, of course, become one more purveyor of lectures and pamphlets. It could disclose the results of its studies—pointing towards better law enforcement or the enactment of new laws. Where the issue was sufficiently clear-cut it could recommend political action. It could, and probably did, provide a climate in which progressive change could take place, without undue haste, both inside and outside the Church. Its specific controversial contribution to the London scene was the issuance of "Fair Lists"—setting forth the names of firms which did *not* rely on sweat-shop conditions or false advertising.

Percy Dearmer was Secretary of the London Branch when he wrote Fabian Tract 133, *Socialism and Christianity*, in 1907. Dearmer, as we have noted, was Headlam's admirer, much influenced by the GSM. Like Headlam, he supported drama as an accessory of religion. He was impressed with the Max Reinhardt production of *The Miracle* in 1912. And he carried to the CSU from the Fabians a thirst for first-hand investigation.

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Consequently the Research Committee of the London CSU made significant contributions to a number of industrial reforms, specifically in the pottery industry where lead poisoning was prevalent. Dearmer lectured for the ILP and wrote for the *Commonwealth*. He was London branch secretary for twenty-one years.

Though in comparison with Headlam and the more militant Secularist organizations the CSU may appear timid, it was not so regarded by the average churchman. When in 1894 the CSU sponsored a series of sermons at St. Edward's, Lombard Street, on "The Church's Forward Movement", even a reform journal declared the utterances "the most scathing indictments of conventional customs and orthodox social ideas".²¹ The series included Archdeacon Farrar, Bishop Stubbs, Canon Shuttleworth and others speaking on such topics as "Christ and Democracy", "The Social Outlook", "The Rights of Property", and "Betting and Gambling".

But to a seasoned observer of heretical and reform movements, the Christian Social Union lacked excitement and sense of purpose. G. K. Chesterton, who eventually moved to Catholicism, could not repress breaking into rhyme about one occasion in which he participated:

The Christian Social Union here
Was very much annoyed;
It seems there is some duty
Which we never should avoid,
And so they sing a lot of hymns
To help the unemployed.

Upon a platform at the end
The speakers were displayed
And Bishop Hoskins stood in front
And hit a bell and said
That Mr. Carter was to pray,
And Mr. Carter prayed.

Then Bishop Gore of Birmingham
He stood upon one leg
And said he would be happier

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If beggars didn't beg,
And that if they pinched his palace
It would take him down a peg.

He said that Unemployment
Was a horror and a blight,
He said that charities produced
Servility and spite,
And stood upon the other leg
And said it wasn't right.

And then a man named Chesterton
Got up and played with water,
He seemed to say that principles
Were nice and led to slaughter
And how we always compromised
And how we didn't orter.

Then Canon Holland fired ahead
Like fifty cannons firing,
We tried to find out what he meant
With infinite enquiring,
But the way he made the windows jump
We couldn't help admiring.

He said the human soul should be
Ashamed of every sham,
He said a man should constantly
Ejaculate "I am"
. . . When he had done I went outside
And got into a tram.²²

There were a few other scattered Church influences in English Socialism. Clayton mentions the formation of an Anglican Church Socialist League in 1906,²³ which may be the same as the Church Socialist League of 1910, noted by Nan Dearmer. *The Christian Socialist* was edited for a time by H. H. Champion and later by W. H. Paul Campbell. It lasted from 1883 to 1891. Clayton says that Campbell also helped to form a Christian

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Socialist Society in 1886 which carried on propaganda lectures "for a few years".

When Randall Davidson became the Primate in 1903, he expressed sympathy with many of Headlam's aims, and, with Creighton as Bishop of London, some of the old bitterness Headlam had engendered within the Church had mellowed. Within his own organizations Headlam was as much of an autocrat as Bradlaugh. But rather than pass them intact into other hands, he discontinued them himself and tapered off his activity in later years, watching the causes he had nurtured being taken up by others. It is hard to believe that he was highly gratified with the progress the Kingdom of Heaven was making by way of the Christian Social Union, but his days of attack were over. He died in 1924 at the age of seventy-seven.

Three years later Bishop Temple, writing an introduction for a collection of essays in *Christian Social Reformers*,²⁴ still pointed to the many dangers of mixing Christianity with economics. (This was not Headlam's old antagonist, Frederick, now deceased, but a thirty-nine-year-old William, who was to lead the British Œcumenical movement, and to become himself Archbishop of York and of Canterbury.) Young Bishop Temple accepted the mid-century shift from "How can we help such-and-such sufferers?" to "What is the true Christian order of Society?" And he mentioned "the quickening sense of responsibility" in connection with the Christian Social Union, "with which the name of Henry Scott Holland is so closely associated". But in the entire essay, called "The Christian Social Movement in the Nineteenth Century", he presented not one inkling that a man named Stewart Headlam ever existed, and gave no evidence of having ever heard of an organization called the Christian Socialist Guild of Saint Matthew.

None of these movements, significant as they were in directing the course of the Church into new social concerns, rested on a theological foundation any more sophisticated than that of F. D. Maurice. A fresh modernist-Platonist view of Christian belief had to await the mature work of William Ralph Inge, who did not come up to London until 1905 and whose influence belongs more properly to the period between the great Wars. Ironically Inge not only differed from the Christian Socialists, he opposed

The New Christians

them. In the Convocation of 1918 he spoke against a resolution which declared that a national minimum wage, state provisions against unemployment, and a recognition of the status of workers were in accordance with the principles of Christianity. All of these proposals implied the existence of avarice, which had no place in a Christian standard of values. He also opposed women's suffrage, and in reply to his letters to *The Times* on the subject, hordes of suffragettes invaded St. Paul's in 1913 and burst into song between the collects.²⁵

As a theologian the great Dean looked on Christianity as the heir to Hellenism. "We cannot preserve Platonism without Christianity nor Christianity without Platonism, nor civilization without both."²⁶ The Anglican Church was for him a pastiche evolved out of "the honestest and most illogical nation on the face of the earth". Dean Inge was a rationalist mystic, and was in many ways close to the position of the Catholic Modernists, though he shunned any such label. Christianity was no new thing, he maintained, but older than Catholicism, much older than Protestantism.

3 Non-conforming Nonconformists

It was many years before Nonconformity produced a Socialist leader to rival the stature of Stewart Headlam, though the seeds of the Labour movement often found readier soil among the free churches than in the Establishment. The theological revolution, too, met with slightly less resistance since creed and custom were less stringent, just as, at the other end of the spectrum, the surges of Revivalism and Fundamentalism caught up more of the Nonconformists, from the Moody-Sankey performances in 1875 to the outbreak of the Welsh revivals in 1904.

The mecca of Nonconformity in London after 1873 was The City Temple on Holborn Viaduct. For nearly thirty years this dominating structure, rivalling near-by St. Paul's on the skyline,

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was virtually the personal property of the Rev. Joseph Parker, who managed to combine sermons of a liberal content designed for the thoughtful with a rousing emotional delivery that satisfied those who came in search of the pentecostal flame. Parker thrived on controversy, and the atmosphere of the Temple was always turbulent; but his radicalism, compared to Stewart Headlam's during the same period, did not go deep. There is no evidence that he had any real desire, as Headlam had, to change the nature of Society or the nature of the Church. What Parker was doing, all unknown to himself, was preparing a pulpit and a congregation to receive a poetic young man who would, for a few brief years, bring some of them real anguish and turmoil and others a new hope, while all London looked on.

Everything that survives of Joseph Parker—sermons, anecdotes, legends, pictures—shows him as a florid, ebullient, winsome person. Who else could have, without offence, chosen as his telegraphic address simply "Preacher, London"? He was the son of a Nonconformist Hexham stonemason and continued to look as if he might have been one himself. In his teens his father's house was a meeting place for all kinds of Dissenters and Radicals. He knew Chartists and Unbelievers from childhood and seems to have been able to enjoy them. For this reason he remained unperturbed by labels. He accepted the fact that there was such a thing as Christian Socialism ("The Socialism of Christ is Universal") but he was not always in sympathy with its practitioners who, he felt, were often engaged in "organized selfishness".¹ We have already observed that his relationship with the Secularist, G. J. Holyoake, was mutually amicable.

He came up to London at the age of twenty-two to assist the pastor of Whitefield's Tabernacle whose voice had failed him. After that he did not take time for further study at a denominational college, but went through an abbreviated course at University College, London, and was ordained at Banbury. From there he moved to a large congregation at Manchester. In 1867 (aged thirty-seven) he was invited to take over the pulpit of the Poultry Chapel in London, the most influential cynosure in Congregationalism. But his Manchester congregation did not want to part with him, and induced him to refuse the London

offer. In gratitude they gave him a purse of 700 guineas. In his sprawling autobiography, *A Preacher's Life*, it is not quite clear whether the money came as a complete surprise, or whether it was a part of the inducement. In any case the Poultry Chapel offer was repeated with more insistence two years later, and this time Parker left his Manchester flock. The 700 guineas clearly remained on his conscience, but he did not offer to return any of it. Parker was a strong man and a good Christian, but he had been a poor boy with small hope of worldly success, and the lure of money was hard to resist.

So was the lure of fame. The London congregation's history went back to the time of Cromwell. The Church had had at least six meeting places, all within the City. Now they were about to dispose of the Poultry Chapel property and establish themselves on a new and permanent site. Some thought was given to a suburban location, but the tradition of the congregation was that of a City church, and in spite of increased costs the decision was made to stay. The Poultry Chapel grounds, which had once cost 10,000 pounds, sold for 50,000 pounds in 1872 to a bank. Holborn Viaduct was itself quite new when the foundation of The City Temple was laid in May 1873. It took a year to build and cost 70,000 pounds.

The name, "The City Temple", had been used by Parker as the title of the church's monthly magazine before it became the name of the new church itself. Although the Preacher had been with them a scant four years when the church was begun, it became really Parker's church. The capacity was 2,500. He conceived of preaching as a sacrament, and the architecture reflected his conception. The "great white pulpit", faced with Caen marble, was at the focal point of curved pews and a deep surrounding balcony. It was raised over nine small romanesque arches. The preacher mounted it by a sweeping curved staircase. This unique rostrum costing 300 gns. was actually a gift from the Corporation of London. "And did this grant of the taxpayers' money to Nonconformity go unchallenged?" F. W. Norwood wanted to know. Apparently it did, and was regarded as a personal tribute to Dr. Joseph Parker.² In later years his bust was in the lobby, his portrait in the vestry, and tablets memorializing him were on the walls. This remarkable structure

was completely demolished on the night of 16-17 April 1941 by German bombing. It was rebuilt and re-opened in 1958, with the exterior looking similar to the original, but the interior modernized and inevitably less distinctive.

It is not surprising to find in these surroundings a man with a reputation for spell-binding. To young aspirants he gave advice freely: breathe through your nose, not your mouth, and pause often to breathe deeply. Speak from the tip of your tongue and tilt your chin up. Use lighter tones, not the cotton-wool of the back of the throat. Sip ice water. Take cold baths before preaching. Especially soak your feet in ice water. Don't speak to anyone before preaching. Go home afterwards and sponge your throat with warm water. For the rest, if a text won't furnish a sermon, *compel* it to.³ If these homiletics seem amusingly naïve, it may be worth noting that actors and public speakers who had small interest in Parker's subject matter came regularly to the Thursday morning services to study his techniques.

Parker instituted the Thursday morning services, actually at noon, to reach business men and shopkeepers during lunch hours. Eventually he followed the Thursday services with smaller conference groups for those who wished to remain.

Today his sermons seem conservatively Bible oriented, and liberal only in the sense that they were tolerant, and used a good many common-sense anecdotes as illustration. He was a pragmatist, not a theologian, and the discipline of Christianity meant more to him than doctrine. His theological statements therefore had the virtue of simplicity. He believed that Jesus "worked up his way to Godhead". . . . "Personally I would not sign a creed my own hand had drawn out. . . . I am a growing man: if that creed were growing I would sign it a thousand times".⁴ He sometimes took the stance of a mystic. Asked if he ever memorized the prayers he used in public, he replied, "Never! No sentence have I ever prayed from memory! I have let the eager and even clamorous heart say what it would to the condescending and ever-listening father."⁵ Though he has never had for himself "one solitary doubt as to the deity of Jesus of Nazareth," he has never been in favour, he says, of persecuting men for their "religious and speculative eccentricities". In a chapter on "Heresies and Heretics" he mentions his support of a number

of men who were in trouble with their churches because of liberal leanings, but he is silent about the real heretics of his own day.

In reply to Holyoake's *The Origin and Nature of Secularism* Parker wrote,

Your Secularism confirms my Christianity. . . . Like yourself I want to get at the truth . . . I account every man orthodox who is honestly endeavouring to get at the truth, however much his calculations may differ from mine. . . . It is quite possible that the Christian case requires new definition and restatement (I am quite sure that ecclesiastical Christianity has often done more harm than good) though I am profoundly assured that Jesus Christ himself only requires to be known to be accepted, adored, and obeyed. . . . You have proved your sincerity by life-long penalty, nobly borne, for which reason, kindly permit me to say so, I hold your character, not in admiration only, but in grateful reverence.⁶

Parker, as is evident, was a man of sentiment, and when his wife, Emma, died in January 1899, his suffering was such that he confessed that he became "almost an atheist".⁷ In a great depression of spirit he wrote to Holyoake: "I am so lonesome and miserable at times as to be no longer a Christian; but the light will come. . . ."⁸ And in these dark days it was the Secularist who had to comfort the preacher. But of these matters the public knew nothing.

Joseph Parker's great popularity in London lasted as long as his life, but there was one episode during his visit to America at the end of 1887 which had sordid overtones involving, once again, money. He had agreed to deliver a eulogy on Henry Ward Beecher, the deceased pastor of Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, and had arranged, through an agent, to make a rather extensive lecture tour of the U.S.A. on the same trip. His lectures were not too well received. His published sermons had circulated in the U.S.A., and some audiences recognized his use of second-hand material. Thereafter the Press was antagonistic. The eulogy was for the benefit of the Beecher Statue Fund and was to be ostensibly "without compensation". It was Parker's impression, however, that his expenses were to be covered, and

assuming that "expenses" included his overseas transportation, he presented a bill for 700 dollars.

Congressman Stephen White, one of the leading men of the Church, publicly assailed Parker for teaming up with his manager to make good the losses of his lecture tour. At a special meeting of the Beecher Fund Committee Parker submitted the letters on which he had based his understanding of the financial arrangements, and the Committee adopted a resolution exonerating him. But the Press was still bitter, and editors made it known that they expected Parker to offer to return the money. Parker made no gesture in this direction.

Unfortunately, just before the storm broke, Parker had wired each of three leading American newspapers an offer to obtain an interview with Gladstone (with whom Parker had a slight acquaintance), and let it be known that the newspaper "which shows the most enterprise shall have the contract". The *New York Herald* reprinted Parker's offer on the same day it reported Congressman White's denunciation, and added wryly that "it has no particular use for Dr. Parker's services".⁹

The preacher who never had to struggle for popularity back home handled his public relations in America very badly. On one occasion he was scheduled to deliver an address on Gladstone to the Bryant Literary Union. The musical portion of the programme lasted until nine o'clock, so when Parker was introduced he told the audience that such a topic as Gladstone would want more time than was left to him. He made some brief remarks on other subjects. The *Herald* reported some laughter at his jokes, but no applause. One old gentleman was reported to have said, "Well, he is the cheekist Englishman I ever heard, and that's saying a great deal." And another: "What sublime impudence! He has even done us out of Gladstone and not even apologized for it."

But his final sermon at Plymouth Church supplied all the melodrama that could possibly have been desired. The church was, of course, overflowing, for those who did not come to hear the great London preacher came to see the "cheeky Englishman". As he ended his peroration, he stopped to scan the congregation in sorrow. "One face is not amongst us," he said (obviously Congressman White's). He then concluded with a

portion of the Lord's Prayer, chokingly arriving at "as we forgive . . . those . . . who have trespassed against us. . . ." He whispered the last words and hurriedly left the platform, leaving the stunned regular pastor to complete the service. It was certain that the Plymouth congregation, at least, would not forget Dr. Parker's visit.

At his leave-taking a few days later he could not resist a speech in which he recounted his thirty-three years in the ministry, and assured his admirers that he was not one penny the richer. Yet at his death he left 23,000 pounds—not an enormous fortune, certainly, but in respect to the times and his own humble beginnings, a gratifying figure for a successful professional career.

We may be sure that the American events were fully reported in England, and that the Secularists, newly liberated from fear of the blasphemy laws by the effrontery of Foote, rejoiced in them. But there is no indication that his City Temple audiences fell away or paid more than passing attention to the lack of understanding and appreciation with which their idol was received abroad.

The City Temple was a regular meeting place for the Congregational Union of England and Wales. This was a loosely knit association without strong central authority. As early as 1884 a few Socialists raised their voices in the assembly—the Rev. A. Mackennal, and the Rev. Fleming Williams of Shore-ditch. They brought up social issues before the Union, even though the hotter ones were always tabled. Officially *The Congregationalist* shuddered that even a few good men should turn to so materialist a view. But Parker, for the most part, supported them.

In any case *The Congregationalist* spoke less and less for The City Temple. Another Nonconformist magazine, previously uncommitted, was gradually caught up by Dr. Parker's magic. It was *The Christian Commonwealth* that became so enamoured of the Temple and remained its faithful spokesman throughout the stormy decade ahead. After October 1901 Albert Dawson, an influential layman and for twenty years a member of the City Temple, became the *Commonwealth's* editor and assured The City Temple of sympathetic reportage. There was nothing in

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The Christian Commonwealth of the 1900s nearly as outspoken or as critical of the Church as might be found in *The Church Reformer* of the eighties. The sermons reprinted had a distinctly liberal tone—from Anglican Charles Gore as well as from Nonconformist J. H. Jowett, John Clifford, and Silvester Horne. Dawson's paper took no strong stand on the Boer War. It was vaguely for an early peace.

Parker, before the Congregational Union in 1901, was urging his colleagues towards a more socially conscious role for the Church. "We cannot afford to spend much more time in re-organizing and polishing our mere machinery," he told them. "We want to get at the great work created for us by the modern society." He asked that the language of the pulpit be modernized and advocated a start towards a "United Congregational" Church which would eventually include most of the Nonconformist bodies. He had no thought of invading the Church of England. "No real dissenting preacher can leave Dissent. If men have left Dissent they have left it because they were never in it, never of it."¹⁰ There were those present who may have remembered the words fourteen years later when another City Temple pastor quietly donned a cassock and left.

The 1901 Conference marked the beginning of Parker's physical decline. He was beset by intermittent illness, and for the next year and a half visiting preachers periodically appeared in the pulpit built for Parker. On the occasions when he was "welcomed back" it was clear that the old lion had not the strength to continue his full duties. The Thursday morning services were the first to go.

The prior connection between Parker and Reginald John Campbell is not clear, though we know that Holyoake was a friend of both. Since 1895 Campbell had been the pastor of Union Street Church in Brighton, the resort to which Holyoake had retired. Editor Dawson had also visited the Brighton church, so there was, in any case, no lack of news of his great success there. A new and larger church was required and was about to be built. As his own strength ebbed, Parker convinced the young man that he should come to London for the Thursday morning services. From October 1902 till May 1903 he commuted between the two churches. *The Christian Commonwealth*, now a

powerful influence in City Temple affairs, gave him unstinted support.

There could hardly have been a more shocking change than the appearance of Reginald Campbell in the great white pulpit. He was fragile, soft-spoken, earning attention by his earnestness and reason. It is hardly surprising that someone mounted a ladder early one morning and painted the word "Ichabod" over the portal. Strangely, Thursday morning audiences not only held firm but began to grow. With 800 in attendance the mid-week services had been considered one of the marvels of London. Within five months Campbell was preaching to standing-room crowds of 3,000, and within a year formal complaints were made by non-seatholders, who, after queuing up in the cold weather outside, were still not assured of admittance.

As Parker lay dying the galleries had to be opened to accommodate the crowds of Thursday, 20 November 1902, come to hear the Rev. Campbell answer some questions on "The Agnostic Tempter". However, the death of another great preacher, Hugh Price Hughes, caused Campbell to speak instead on Death. At the close Campbell announced that Joseph Parker, "whom many think to be the greatest preacher in the world", was also probably in his last hour of life. For a brief space Nonconformist London recalled in eulogies and editorials the man whose personal magic was so much greater than anything that could be communicated in print. Tributes came from high churchman and Secularist. Newspaper coverage rivalled that accorded to the last rites of the Archbishop of Canterbury (Frederick Temple) who died shortly afterwards. Eventually a church in Sussex was named the Dr. Parker Memorial Church.

Then, almost undecorously, The City Temple turned its complete attention to Reginald Campbell. Though he had been invited only for a six-month trial on Thursday mornings, there was not the slightest doubt about the choice of Parker's successor. Certainly there was none at Brighton, where Campbell's congregation followed the London events with dismay and made preparations for their own loss.

Reginald Campbell was thirty-five years old when he came to The City Temple, the son and grandson of Nonconformist ministers. He was a London boy, but was so fragile a child that he was

taken away from the city to be raised by maternal grandparents in Northern Ireland. He recalled that as a child he was rarely free from pain of one sort or another, and was once actually pronounced dead. But he was basically not morbid, though he was brought up in Ulster to believe that most of Ireland was condemned. Because of his delicacy he was tutored at home by a woman teacher. In his early teens his father brought him back to England. Here he went through a period of "adolescent paganism" and became a student teacher and eventually a junior master in a small high school in Cheshire under an Oxford honourman. This meant preparing boys for Oxford and Cambridge exams in divinity, and required his being confirmed in the Church of England. He complied with a clear conscience since he liked the Church atmosphere, and there were no objections from his family.¹¹

His father, objecting to the Westminster Confession of the Presbyterians, had become a United Methodist minister; his paternal grandfather, on the same grounds, had turned Congregationalist. Reginald inherited his grandfather's pulpit chair. By the time he got round to matriculating at Oxford himself, many of his former students had preceded him. His intention at Oxford was to take Holy Orders, and then to go on teaching. He felt he was more academic than ecclesiastical. He felt completely unfitted to become a public speaker. His tension and nervousness were such that he literally needed a pulpit to hold on to. But while at the University he underwent a prolonged mystical experience which made Anglican orders impossible for him. He went instead to the Church of his grandfather where no doctrinal subscription was required. His first and only charge prior to City Temple was at Brighton.

The nervousness, which Campbell claimed he never outgrew, must have gone unnoticed by the audience under the spell of his earnestness. In this and in other matters, however, Campbell was not always as ingenuous as he painted himself to be. He could not even have been heard in many of the large halls in which he spoke, to say nothing of holding rapt attention, if he had not carefully and consciously developed a style to fit his own personality and his own intent. Early in his City Temple ministry a reporter observed that he had trained his voice to

adapt to various buildings, that he spoke with "spontaneous and exact" expression, and that his quotations were always literally accurate. He probably could not have survived the "ice-water technique" of Parker, but he knew just as surely what he was doing.

An artist would have delighted in the grace and freedom of his gestures, the eloquent language of hand and arm, the poise of the slight, youthful figure now bent far forward over the pulpit desk, now drawn up in stately erectness, with the lines of his black gown falling in straight, severe folds.¹²

This observation was made within a month after he arrived in London, when he, as well as his listeners, were well aware that he was in the position of filling a great man's place. His later statement that "public life has never had any charm for me" must not be taken too seriously. Except for later illnesses, all reports of Campbell preaching to a congregation or lecturing to a trade union meeting consistently present an artist who is enjoying his work.

What, then, was the nature of the message that he brought? Was it really substantially different from Parker's? The answer is that it was. Both theologically and socially he was not only in advance of Parker, but his position was also more sophisticated. But this was not apparent to many of his congregation at the outset. For whereas Parker tended to sound shocking but on reflection turned out to be only mildly unorthodox, Campbell's spiritual and poetic tone carried implications which, if understood, might be deeply disturbing. Campbell's style, for all its directness and poetic simplicity, retained the professional conventions of his time—"Yea, verily . . . Nay . . . Think you this brethren. . . ." And he was fond of quoting from poems and hymns, all of which he did quite effectively.

His Christianity was a mystical-rational combination, in the direction of Renan or of Moncure Conway. He was careful to deal with the "spiritual Christ" not the "historical Jesus" whom the Continental critics were trying vainly to rediscover. He spoke of Christ as a "divine impulse", that summed up everything that was good. "Instead of thinking about rules of service, we think about Him, and thus we are compelled towards the

goodness which ever recedes as we approach it, which is a spirit rather than a code.”¹³ In his first Christmas sermon he made it clear that Incarnation meant not only that God became man, but that man is becoming God, that humanity progresses toward the Godhead. That is, in fact, the creative evolution of Henri Bergson which Bernard Shaw had adapted to his religion of the Life Force. This was the heresy which Stewart Headlam was required to repudiate when Shaw spoke for the GSM at Essex Hall in 1906. The week before (on 22 November) Shaw had said much the same thing at the City Temple’s Literary Society in “The Religion of the British Empire”.¹⁴ Campbell had no bishop to instruct him in the matter, but on the Sunday following, his full sermon (“The Modes of God”) was a commentary on Shaw’s remarks. Shaw, without calling himself a Christian, had, said the minister, grasped the central principle of the Gospel with a firm hand.

Campbell and Shaw remained on friendly terms, at least up until World War I. Shaw spoke at the City Temple Literary Society at least four times, and *The Christian Commonwealth* gave space, in addition, to speeches he made elsewhere. Some public altercation arose when the *Commonwealth* on 14 October 1908 featured a banner headline on the first page: “How I Came To Believe in Christ, by G. Bernard Shaw.” Perusal of his actual words, however, quickly reveals that GBS had not been converted to Christianity. He had said that Mr. Campbell had finally placed before him a figure of Christ in which an educated man living in the twentieth century could believe, and a person whose ideas were worth examining. Nevertheless one Secular journalist described Shaw as “crawling to the feet of Jesus”. The public dialogue between Shaw and Campbell on the nature of Jesus continued for some time.

Campbell’s position on the social question was more readily understood. He was drawn into the Labour movement in a rather negative manner. He held conservative views on the Church’s role in public education and also on the matter of Sunday observance. On these issues he was attacked by the trade unions, and found himself very nearly involved in a street riot. “The above episode . . . had the consequence of bringing me into contact with the Labour movement for the first time, and

changed my outlook on the social question.”¹⁵ He became a warm admirer of Keir Hardie and under his influence joined the Independent Labour Party, remaining a member all his life. Hardie, an ex-miner and once a lay preacher, had almost heroic fascination for Campbell. To the fragile minister he loomed as a great and simple man who thought God’s bounty generous enough if man’s selfishness would keep from getting in the way. The War, Campbell thought, broke Hardie’s heart and hastened his end, shattering his dream of internationalism.

Incongruous as he may have appeared, Campbell began speaking on Labour platforms and could claim some share in bringing Labour and the Church to better terms than they were at the turn of the century. “The truth was,” he wrote in 1916, “that the Christian Church had not adjusted itself to the moral problems created by modern industrialism, and has barely done so yet.”¹⁶ When his health forced him to reduce his schedule (about 1911) he discontinued his public work for ILP.

His interest in the Fabians was somewhat less, but he was a member. They were the “aristocratic Socialists . . . a highly superior set of people, and they know it thoroughly”.¹⁷ But he learned from them that our social system is not Christian—it is largely anti-Christian, and needs to be socialized before the individual can be set free to develop as a moral being. Evidences that the high Fabian regard for research has rubbed off on him appear as he contrasts the days when there was close personal touch between master and man, with the present state where capital has cut off the worker from his employer. The factory system was bad enough under such men as Cobden and Bright, he declared. What is to be expected under Pierpont Morgan and Company? And he gives information on cycles of depression, and statistics on the unemployed over forty. He sets forth some Christian principles: unlimited competition is wrong. . . . Every man has a right to a job . . . industries that are essential to the life of a nation should belong to the nation . . . the state has moral responsibilities for social welfare.¹⁸ He told the Socialists at Liverpool in 1908:

I am a Socialist because I am a Christian as I understand the word. I have been driven to that position by the sheer logic of

my own gospel—as I have frankly admitted to Mr. Keir Hardie in private. My own historical study . . . has taught me this, that Christianity began as a social gospel, pure and simple. . . . The more one investigated Christian origins the more one became convinced that the Church of Jesus as we know it today has somehow got away from her moorings.¹⁹

These, then, were in essence the theological and social messages Campbell brought to central London. Having come thus far in a study of London's heresies it would be fair and accurate to observe that he had come in Socialism not quite as far as Headlam had twenty years before; and in his view of a historical Jesus as distinct from a spiritual Christ, considerably less far than Moncure Conway, thirty years before. But the audiences—or congregations—we have dealt with thus far regarded themselves as "special" or "advanced" groups. Only Bradlaugh can be said to have had a wide popular appeal, and even he was limited by a hard line of "respectability" through which he could break only with the help of Annie Besant, who, in turn, abandoned popular movements for the exotic. Reginald Campbell brought these issues, somewhat attenuated and sentimentalized it is true, to the respectable crowds of central London. In sheer popularity and impact he was the most eligible rival the London Christians ever offered to Charles Bradlaugh, even though he appeared a generation too late.

In the first years of the century a good deal of concern was expressed about "Godless London", and most of the churches were nearly empty. In the 1902-3 survey made by the *Daily News* at the direction of its proprietor, George Cadbury, Murdie-Smith reported that The City Temple had an average morning attendance of 3,463, an evening attendance of 3,545 (total, 7,008), with slightly more men than women. Recent renovation may have enlarged the seating capacity beyond its original 2,500, but these figures definitely represent audiences in excess of seats as a regular occurrence every Sunday. The Thursday morning services were not included in the survey. In the same study the near-by Cathedral Church of St. Paul's totalled for all Sunday services combined only 2,337. All Anglican churches within "the City" totalled 10,561, only a

third more than The City Temple alone. (Since many churchgoers attended both morning and evening services, the totals represent some duplication.)

R. J. Campbell's early announcement that he would continue the Thursday morning services met with instant applause. Sermons were almost exactly forty-five minutes in length. He spoke without notes, but with a sense of careful preparation. Thursdays were soon as busy as any Sunday. The morning service was supplemented by Thursday afternoon "at homes": prayer meeting from three to four; tea and talk from four to five; at five an address by an invited guest—W. T. Stead was the first.

Almost immediately on arrival he dominated *The Christian Commonwealth*. His sermons were carried in full, and much of the news columns were filled with his activities. Within a year a *Life of R. J. Campbell* appeared in bookstalls for 1d. 6d. Some of his sermons circulated as pamphlets, some were gathered into books. On 21 May 1903 a special day of public recognition for him was declared at The City Temple. *The Commonwealth* for the occasion printed photographs of him, his wife and daughter, his new home and grounds, Hill Lodge at Enfield.

By 1904, when he began to be the source of controversy, he gave more attention to the editing of his remarks after they were taken down stenographically for publication at the rate of one, two, or three a week. At this point too they became protected by copyright: "in the U.K. by R. J. Campbell and in the U.S.A. by Fleming H. Revell Co." By the summer of 1906 admirers could purchase *The R. J. Campbell Birthday Book*, "selections of prayers and sermons, with his favourite poetical quotations, portrait and autograph", 256 pages, gilt letters and gilt edges, bound in red or green. Cloth 2s. 6d., red leather 3s. 6d.

There is no question that he was something of a matinee idol, as handsome young preachers were wont to be in the golden pre-cinema days. There is no record of anyone swooning at his approach, but when he began the practice of coming down into the congregation after evening services to answer questions, one lady was heard to sigh, "Oh, he is like an angel come down from heaven!" People enjoyed confessing their troubles to him. ("Of course I never professed to give absolution.") He became "a famous man", and all sorts of people came to visit him, including

some cranks who wanted to mete out the Lord's judgment against false prophets. Twice his life was threatened. At one time, closeted with such a maniac, he tried to buy time by suggesting others more worthy of extinction: Bernard Shaw, for instance, or Theodore Roosevelt, or Lloyd George. Finally young Winston Churchill seemed the most eligible and the disturbed man withdrew. Fortunately he was never heard from again.

All this from the preaching of a fragile man. Inevitably he had to become less easily accessible, and employed a kind of secretary-bodyguard. His holidays became more frequent, though often they were combined with writing.

Albert Dawson, editor of *The Christian Commonwealth*, was remarkably fluent with shorthand, and we owe him a great debt for preserving intact not only the sermons of Parker and Campbell, but the speeches of other notable men of the times who were of interest to the enterprising editor. Between the years 1903 and 1906 when Dawson's pencil flicked out such statements from Campbell sermons as, "There is no dividing line between humanity and deity", or "There is nothing that is not God", he knew, he said, a storm was brewing.²⁰

It broke on 12 January 1907. On that date the *Daily Mail* published an interview with the Rev. Campbell in which it was made clear that, for Campbell, the recorded events of the "historical" Jesus were merely legendary and often had little to do with the spirit of the divine Christ; and that the importance of contemporary Christianity lay in Christ's immanence, his presence in men and in history. This same theme had run through almost all his sermons in London for four years, but here it was stated not to the congregation who had come to know him, and not with the magic of his own presence and voice, but baldly and for all to see. In the interview he used the phrase, "the new theology".

Flare-ups in the Press were common enough in London, but this one was unique for the duration and intensity of a purely theological argument. For the moment Campbell's position as a Socialist was not involved—was, for many, not even known. The blaze was not confined to London. It spread quickly to Newcastle, Leeds, Birmingham, everywhere the Congregational Union was strong, for it was within Congregationalism that the

blow stung the most. Headings like "Salvation by Faith Repudiated", and "The Bible Not Inspired", introduced editorials suggesting Mr. Campbell cease to draw his pay, or questioning for what purpose The City Temple was built. The ageing followers of Bradlaugh and Conway must have chuckled with irony or sighed with despair.

On the 23rd, the *Daily Mail* carried a statement from Campbell to explain that the term "New Theology" was in common use, but that he himself didn't like it since the truths for which it stood were not new in Christian experience. "We are now getting back behind St. Augustine to the attitude of the Greek Fathers and the Early Church," he wrote. He claimed he did not wish to jettison the idea of divine Transcendence, but he did wish to de-emphasize it. He hoped the religious "quickenings" would spread until it put an end to the alienation of both the masses and the intellectuals from religion.

The frightened ones were certainly not reassured when he used the pulpit to say plainly that

I do not think our object should be to find a remedy which will save the Churches. That would be equivalent to putting the cart before the horse. What does it matter whether the Churches are saved or not so long as the soul of the nation is saved?

Or when he referred to the heretical Roman priest as

the brave and good Father Tyrrell, who not long ago was expelled from the Jesuit order—but who, I understand, still remains a priest in the Church of Rome—for daring to teach something which in substance and outlook is, after all, the New Theology. I would not like to label Father Tyrrell with that name—probably he would strenuously object—but that man of God is far nearer to the position of your preacher this morning than he is to some of his own communion, or I am to some of mine.²¹

But discussion could no longer be kept on such a level. Campbell had made a point of answering questions after evening services, and now they became very pointed indeed: Do you

believe in the resurrection of the body? Does God really answer prayers? Was Jesus born of a virgin? Was Jesus God? And (from a nine-year-old) if God is all-powerful, why doesn't he kill the Devil? Campbell did some skilful fencing, but on the whole the answers were clear and frank. Where they were not, it was likely that he had never made up his own mind. For it eventually became clear that he had not the complete inner security that his devotees thought he had.

The body would not resurrect. Even in life it was a changing and decaying thing. But he confessed to being impressed with the evidence of "supernormal phenomena" gathered by the London Bureau for Psychic Research which pointed to the survival of individual "self-consciousness". He regretted that his own work was too important to allow him time to participate in spiritualistic experiments. Prayers are answered only in the sense that they go into a "vast treasure house" and return to you. Jesus had a human father or he could not have been a real man. The virgin-birth story is a pre-Christian legend. Jesus was not God; he was an "expression" of God. The only Devil that needs killing is inside you, and a strong life with God's help will overcome him. The Unitarians promptly supported Campbell, and, to his dismay, "claimed" him. He left on a four-week holiday to work on his book, *The New Theology*.

The controversy was waiting for him when he got back. Most of the Press was in opposition. Support from Freethinkers, such as Stanton Coit, was probably even more embarrassing than that of the Unitarians. Two prominent members of The City Temple resigned in protest. Reports circulated that he was "in trouble" with his congregation. If so, the statistics were not an indication. While Campbell enjoyed a bit of martyrdom by calling himself "the most unpopular man in England", the Temple remained packed twice on Sundays and once on Thursdays. And Dawson (something of a Press agent, to be sure) reported unprecedented social and intellectual activity, and a congregation "permeated with a fine spirit of unity and fraternity".

Dawson seized the opportunity to make *The Christian Commonwealth* the organ of the new movement and at year-end reported the highest circulation of its history. The paper ran a competition for the best definition of "The New Theology".

Some of the suggestions submitted were "Reasonable Theology"; "The Second Reformation"; and "The survival of the fittest in the orthodoxy of the past". Dawson put out a special "New Theology" issue on 14 February 1907, covering the front page with pictures of liberal divines from Henry Ward Beecher, Kingsley, Maurice, and Martineau to Campbell himself. Later, in keeping with the more grandiose outreach of his pastor, Dawson decided to enlarge the influence of his paper to include Catholic Modernism, the Liberal Movement in the Church of England, the new spirit in Unitarianism, and the reform movement in Judaism. At that time he set up an editorial board of which Campbell was the chairman. Stopford Brooke and Philip Snowden, M.P., were members, plus ten others spread out geographically. Father Tyrrell had apparently agreed to contribute occasionally. (He died a month after the announcement.) Dawson made clear that up to this time (June 1909) the Rev. Campbell had had nothing to do with the administration or policy of *The Christian Commonwealth*. Many readers, not surprisingly, had made such an assumption.²²

Reverberations extended into the Church of England. Although at least three bishops made scathing pronouncements, Basil Wilberforce, Archdeacon of Westminster, devoted a morning sermon to Campbell's defence. He regarded men of Campbell's type as seers, he told his congregation. "Let the masters of ceremonies, be they mitred abbots or Episcopal legislators, or governing bodies of trust chapels, be patient with the seers." They, like the servants who drew the water at Cana, "know".²³

Almost at once, in January 1907, a New Theology League appeared. Within a month it had changed to the Society for the Encouragement of Progressive Religious Thought, meant to fill an important role in the new reformation which was gathering. But Campbell was not an organizer. He was, in fact, a man who appeared to operate without any method at all, to the amazement and sometimes the despair of his associates. He was blessed with the aid of an eloquent publicist in Albert Dawson, and a number of lucid apologists, principally the earnest young minister, Dr. Joseph Warschauer. But he attracted no one equal to Frederick Verinder of the Guild of Saint Matthew in organizing a real movement.

The publication of his *The New Theology* later in the year was somewhat anticlimactic. What he had to say he had already said, and most people agreed he had said it better in his sermons. The book was damned by those who opposed him, and by his supporters was called "a turning point in the history of the world". However his *Christianity and the Social Order*, following hard on its heels, placed before the faithful of his congregation a side of him they had little known. To add to his other heresies so uncompromising a statement as, "I now regard Socialism as the practical expression of Christian ethics and the evangel of Jesus," unnerved some who had to this point held fast. And the conservative theologians within the Union must have given him up completely when they discovered, in the new pages, that true Socialism would in truth be the second coming of Christ.

In 1910 on his way back from the Continent, Campbell was suddenly taken ill in Paris. The National Free Church Council was meeting in Hull, but it failed to send any message of sympathy to the ailing minister of their leading metropolitan church. Instead, in his absence, there was some thinly veiled derogation thrown in his direction. Dr. Forsyth used the terms "quack" and "adventurer". Campbell returned home in mid-March, but did not resume preaching until April. Hitherto he had sailed along on the crest of his own popularity, regarding his critics with commendable tolerance. Now, either because of his health, or because of deep spiritual doubting, or because he sensed a cleavage within the City Temple itself, he allowed news of these remarks to irritate him. He sensed that the Congregational Union would be happy to be rid of him. He determined, unwisely, to push them to a test.

What followed proved nothing, and even *The Christian Commonwealth* failed to make a Holy War out of a sordid squabble. The Congregational Union of England and Wales next met in May at the Memorial Hall. King Edward had just died, but it was difficult to maintain a mood of staid solemnity. In spite of his central position in Congregationalism, Reginald Campbell was not represented in the inner councils of the Union. He had addressed a letter to the Executive Council, calling attention to the insults he had suffered from those who were represented on it. These uncharitable remarks had never been withdrawn, nor

had the Council taken any pains to dissociate itself from them. It was well known that the Union could not legally "excommunicate" anyone. "But there is such a thing as practical excommunication, and my contention is that this is being drastically enforced at the present time against certain individuals."²⁴ Since the Council had failed to act in response to his request, Campbell now proposed to submit the question of his "excommunication" to the Assembly.

Campbell had made his intentions well known in advance, and the Hall was therefore crowded with his supporters. The chairman had requested that in view of the national calamity they should refrain from applause. It was evident from the first that they would not do so. The new chairman, who had to preside over the ticklish business, was a fellow Christian Socialist, C. Silvester Horne, M.P. His astute and sensitive handling of the case prevented the meeting from getting completely out of hand. Campbell's presentation was constantly interrupted with "Hear, Hear"s and "No, No"s. And at the mention of Dr. Forsyth's indiscretions there were calls of "Shame!"

Self-respect compels me to ask this assembly of my brethren whether it does or does not endorse this general policy. . . . I understand that some of the members present are prepared to submit the following resolution to you: "That in the opinion of this Assembly it is not desirable that the Minister of the City Temple should withdraw from the Union."

Chairman Horne's response was interrupted by cries from the floor of "Why don't you repudiate what Dr. Forsyth said?" and the sound of quacking to remind the chairman of the insulting word. Forsyth, who was on the platform, chose not to acknowledge the interruptions, but Horne, in order to get on with the business, finally stated: "I personally regret that Dr. Forsyth put his view of things as he did." This was greeted by cheers, but the wily chairman continued by equally regretting "that Mr. Campbell has put some things as he has . . . I do not think he knows how deeply and poignantly he wounds the most sacred feelings and convictions . . . by some of the things he has said, and some of the things he has written about the person of Jesus Christ."

It was impossible, he explained, to put such a resolution as Campbell had described to a floor vote, since membership in the Assembly was by appointment of the local Unions to the larger body. Besides Congregationalism had no creed on which to test orthodoxy, and nobody could drive anybody else out. Home passed quickly from his reply to the benediction. Though Campbell had succeeded in disgracing those who had spoken in cowardly fashion against him and his cause, his own stature had certainly shrunk in the process.

The City Temple had to get along more and more without him. He spent much of 1911 on an American tour, lecturing at stops from New York City to Berkeley, California. He was much more successful with the Americans than his unfortunate predecessor had been, and when he returned home, in February 1912, he could report many new friends for The City Temple and for *The Christian Commonwealth*. His health, too, seemed improved but this was illusory. He was forced to lighten his load to the minimum. His malady was largely nervous, showing itself as insomnia and irregular heart action. To the increasing anxiety about the validity of his own religious position, was now added the anguish of the impending War. Many of his friends in the ILP. were opposed to any involvement. Pacifists from the ranks of Socialism and Labour sought his help.

Amid impending War news of 15 July 1914 came the news of Campbell's breakdown. To what extent this was a genuine spiritual crisis, as opposed to a physical or emotional one, would be debated by his City Temple followers long afterwards. He returned to the pulpit two months later to justify England's entry in the War—a position which, based on his earlier alignments, many did not expect him to take. "The Christian ministers who believe their country to be in the right in the present contest are not preaching war," he wrote later. "But we believe that war was in this case unavoidable if our nation was to be saved from dishonour, and all that we hold most dear, including our dreams of a nobler and happier Commonwealth, from destruction."²⁵

All things considered, the announcement of his resignation on 23 September 1915 could not have come as a shocking surprise. But at the end of the notice was the statement that if he returned

to a pulpit, it would be in a different communion. The only reason given was flattering but not wholly credible: "My love for you is so deep . . . I cannot feel that I could go from you to another Congregational church." Two weeks later, after his last sermon, he repeated the announcement, and added that he expected to be ordained by the Bishop of Birmingham and to be attached to the cathedral church in that city. He would not go into reasons at that time. . . .

Puzzlement was confounded when the Bishop of Birmingham reported that Reginald Campbell had repudiated *The New Theology*. Pressed for a statement *The Christian Commonwealth* played innocent, although Dawson already knew that Campbell had purchased the rights to his book to prevent its being reprinted. His reason, when it came, was simply that "the immanentism advocated by the book is inadequate as a presentation of Christian truth, and pressed too far is erroneous". He promised a full explanation eventually and was off for a visit to field hospitals in France.

The "explanation" came while the War still raged. It was book-length and called *A Spiritual Pilgrimage*. (Was there conscious irony in the antithesis with Conway's *The Earthward Pilgrimage*? Not likely.) The book, Campbell states, is in response to a formal request of the Congregational Union for an explanation as to why the leading minister of The City Temple should leave Nonconformity and be ordained into the Church of England. Campbell wants to tell the story of his whole spiritual development rather than answer with a theological tract. It is pleasantly rambling and a revealing autobiography of the early years, but it is surely not satisfying as an apologia. The narrative of his shift in the "Christ Myth Controversy" from the Unitarians and Tyrrell's Modernism back towards orthodoxy is, to put it as generously as possible, equivocal. One gets the impression that he wants to occupy all positions simultaneously. It is not, in 1916, the work of a perfectly lucid mind.

In the fury of the War, the shift of anyone's theological position was of small moment; all sorts of changes became commonplace. The situation at The City Temple, where alternating substitute preachers filled the pulpit, was also unexceptional during the War years. For some, Campbell would remain, as

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Curator Bertram Hammond remembers him, "a very lovable character", as long as he lived. For most, he simply disappeared from the London scene. After the War he became Vicar of Christ-Church, Westminster; in 1924 he returned to Brighton as Incumbent of Holy Trinity; then in 1930 to Chichester as Chancellor of the Cathedral. He retired as Canon Emeritus there in 1946. Like the equally fragile Holyoake, he outlived all the associates of his turbulent years, and died on 1 March 1956, just short of ninety.

Campbell's tenure at The City Temple was a dozen years. The years of brilliant tumult were from 1907 to 1910. When he had gone, those who had sat under his spell must have wondered if it had not all been a dream. They had had the sense of riding the crest of a new reformation into a reformed society. The Kingdom of Heaven was attainable—perhaps almost at hand. Then the angelic man who had brought them to these heights became confused, confessed his error, and left them, as the War came upon them and swept away the old Europe. When the great let-downs of the world are recounted, a special word will need to be said for the pre-War congregation at London's City Temple.

4 Catholic Modernism

When Reginald John Campbell was in the midst of the *mêlée* over the "New Theology", he made a pointed reference to the similarity of his position and his beliefs to those of the Catholic Modernist, Father George Tyrrell. Father Tyrrell found Campbell's book lacking in "the mystery and the immortality" he needed as a Catholic. And after Campbell became an Anglican priest he revised his earlier opinion of Tyrrell, and decided that his contribution was brilliant but negative and evasive.

To the layman not concerned with the finer theological points, Campbell's earlier observation holds. At the time when he made it, the two were indeed on similar ground; so similar that their

differences are bound to stand out in relief. Neither of them at that moment was in good health. Both, in mid-career, were under censure for trying to make room in current theology for true scholarship and scientific methods—in short, for change. Campbell, under no external pressure to recant, nonetheless felt impelled to move back to orthodoxy and quietly lived on. Tyrrell, standing up against the full wrath of Rome, remained obdurate and died.

We have been using the term “heretic” in a necessarily broad sense to include both atheistic Bible-smashers, and those who had merely stepped beyond the accepted confines of the orthodoxy of the times. Tyrrell was not motivated by the social injustices and poverty that moved so many of his contemporaries to revolt. The question of Socialism, as such, did not concern him. Sympathetically human to an intense degree, he was nevertheless essentially other-worldly. His revolt was theological. He was, in other words, a true heretic in the tradition of the Middle Ages, and his Church had no trouble in recognizing him.

Tyrrell was not alone. The Modernists existed in all the Catholic countries, particularly in Italy and France. It may be proper to call Modernism a “movement”, but it was not an organization. It had no formal existence, no geographical centre. The Modernists were almost all priests, professors, editors, and writers, who regarded themselves as sincere and loyal Catholics searching for a fresh orientation towards the modern world and modern culture. Alfred Loisy, a priest and professor at Paris, and Baron Friedrich von Hügel, a German writer and teacher who spent much of his life in England, were among the most distinguished of the group. Father Tyrrell was the principal English representative—certainly the most tragic, and perhaps the most courageous of all the adversaries of Pope Pius X. Although he resided in or near London for a good portion of his adult life, he was not properly a Londoner. He cannot really be said to have been at home anywhere after he left his native Ireland.

Though he was not alone as a Modernist, he had reason to feel estranged in England. Victorian-Edwardian Catholics were an oppressed minority. The great influx from Ireland had created Irish sections in all the large cities, often slum areas.

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Overworked clergy and lay organizations fought to stave off the worst evils of poverty and drunkenness, to distribute devotional readings, and to prevent massive drifts from the faith. The earlier Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the Total Abstinence League of the Cross, as well as the later Catholic Association, Catholic Truth Society, and the Catholic Social Union (later Guild) were too busy with the basic essentials of life to give thought to progressive doctrines. They had to fight a virulent anti-Catholicism too, though Inglis claims that all these organized activities had less effect against such antagonism than Manning's single action in the 1889 dock strike.¹

Among the middle and upper classes the prejudice against Rome was of a different order, and was partially offset by the eminent conversions of J. H. Newman, H. E. Manning, and of Tyrrell himself. Vidler points out that early-nineteenth-century Catholicism was essentially romantic; that is, it appealed to the glamour of the past rather than to the rising science of the day.² In reaction, John Henry Newman, though he was most certainly not a Modernist, and accepted without protest the complete dogma of Rome, did investigate the lines of belief and, in his so-called theory of "doctrinal development", did recognize certain changes in approach. Pope Leo XIII, who reigned from 1878 to 1903, seemed open to such ideas. He made Newman a cardinal. He opened the Vatican archives and gave the Church's liberals hope that Rome would not be utterly unbending in its traditionalism. But Catholic theology remained steadfastly "pre-Straussian", as Schweitzer maintained, refusing to deal with any historical consideration of the miracles or with what scholars by that time were calling the "Johannine question", the problem of the authorship of the fourth Gospel.³ Leo's encyclical of 1890, *Providentissimus Deus*, reaffirmed the complete inerrancy of the Bible, to the despair of Alfred Loisy, who was teaching that Christianity was, in effect, the accretion of the entire history of the Church, its "full and rich corporate life", in Vidler's phrase, and was not dependent on Biblical infallibility or on scholastic orthodoxy. Loisy, gifted with French realism, accepted the fact that he was destined for excommunication. It was left for Pius X to take the final action against the Modernists and restore the monolithic orthodoxy of the thirteenth century.

Apologists for the Pope claimed that the Church was not against "progress," that it blessed the new technology (wireless, airships, etc.).

The only liberty she denies to her members is that of saying "no" where God has said "yes", or to put it otherwise, the liberty, in those who profess her creeds and share her communion, of saying "yes" and "no" at the same time.

The same commentator explained why the Pope condemned the Modernists: The summary is, I think, substantially correct:

1. Modernists deny the divine facts of the Gospel as historically true.
2. They deny Christ knew he was God and Saviour.
3. They deny perpetuity of dogma.
4. They deny that Christ personally founded the Church or instituted the Sacraments.
5. They deny that the Pope's authority (and the whole hierarchy) comes from Christ and the Apostles; but derives more properly from the Christian people.⁴

Tyrrell's remarkable autobiographical letters, published posthumously, were written to Miss Maude D. Petre, member of a notable English family and herself a convert to Catholicism. The letters began in 1901 after Tyrrell's difficulties with the Church had already become acute, so that these memoirs were inevitably coloured by the tragic struggles of his later years. He says in his first letter that he is writing "in order to piece together this battered life of mine into some flattering semblance of unity and coherence".⁵

Tyrrell was born in Dublin in February 1861, a member of the Established Church of Ireland. The Tyrrells were an old family going back to the Norman Conquest. There is a Sir James Tyrrel in Shakespeare's *Richard III*—

. . . a discontented gentleman

Whose humble means match not his haughty mind,

and Father Tyrrell enjoyed applying the quotation to himself. The humble means were in part the result of his father's death two months before George was born. Along with a sister and a

brother he was brought up with his mother's folks. The household also included a militantly Calvinistic aunt. Brother William had a deformed back and had eventually to be confined to a wheelchair. In an effort to improve Willie's health, the family kept moving from the city to the country to the seashore. Willie, ten years George's senior, was brilliant, and as his health failed to improve, became mercilessly bitter. George's compulsive attachment to the crippled brother until he died at twenty-five might remind readers of Thomas Wolfe of the similarly strange relationship between Eugene and his brother, Ben.

Out of the city, George acquired a love for nature and a reverence for life. Like Schweitzer he would rescue flies and other insects from man's destruction, and could not bring himself to eat the fish he had seen caught. At the age of five, as the result of some disobedience or other, he fell over a banister and damaged his ear. Had he died from the fall, his minister told him, he would have gone straight to hell. ("How can people be so silly," he wrote to Maude Petre, "as to imagine that a child of five is capable of sin or righteousness?") The damaged ear led to an abscess operation three years later that changed the pattern of his health from robust to delicate, and left him permanently deaf on the injured side.

As with Campbell up at Ulster, Irish Protestants in the south also regarded Catholicism as "the Scarlet Lady". George knew nothing directly of her until they moved to Rathmines, where he found that some of his family's friends attended the little Roman chapel.

And I wondered to see gentlefolk belonging to such a vulgar religion, suited only for servants. . . . And certainly the interior of the Dublin chapels with their dirt and tinsel and flashy gew-gaws and staring pictures and images, all tended to confirm my belief in the essential commonness of Romanism.⁶

When Tyrrell came to the age of seven in the recounting of his life to Miss Petre, he drew a heavy black line across the page to mark the end of his natural innocence—"when I began to tamper and spoil the self that God had given me."⁷

The discipline of his schooling was "too Irish, too easy". He

recalls strange fits of rage that seem to have no motivation. He became unmanageable both at school and at home and was sent off to a boarding school in County Cork. High-church ritual scandalized him with the birettas and cassocks, yet he found the sensation agreeable. As he continued his studies at Trinity College, Dublin, he experimented with the new sin until he found himself stealing into Catholic churches for mass and benediction. But he continued to be depressed by the tawdriness of the decorations and the perfunctory attitude of the priests and their "graceless ministrations". The original thrill of discovery soon left him. "I did not seek religion for the sake of any pleasure it would give me or any good it might do me," he later recalled, "but in that strange impersonal way in which a man will often pursue an ideal to its last consequences."⁸ Unable to choose between High Anglican and Roman, he went finally to London to work in an Anglican Settlement House. Like many another Irish expatriate, he never returned.

In London his passage into Catholicism was rapid—perhaps too rapid. Characteristically, once he had made the commitment he felt impelled to go the whole distance by seeking admission into the Society of Jesus, the most rigorous of the Catholic priestly orders. In spite of (as he thought) his own ignorance and lack of piety, the Jesuits were ready to accept him. Inwardly it was a disappointment to him that they should not have made the road more difficult. The initial disenchantment was, to his own horror, to become complete. It was not that he was merely intellectually disappointed with the Society (although he was); he was appalled at the extent of miraculous legendry that clung to it, and at its group sense of self-righteousness. Tyrrell confesses that he always accepted the miraculous elements of Catholicism as subject to his own interpretations.

He was an easy scholar, and the Order had no trouble using him in the preliminary roles of student and teacher. He spent a number of years at the English school at Malta, then attended the Jesuit seminary at Stonyhurst, where at length, in 1894, he became a professor of philosophy. He had brief excursions into settlement houses, where he says he was happiest. "I did not," he writes, "after my Maltese experience, either love or reverence the Society—I never did at any time; but gradually I got

interested in it as a system, as a way of life." In contrast to the boys who had been trained in Jesuit schools and came into the priesthood because no other vocation ever presented itself, Tyrrell was considered to be "of the world". He had trouble finding "thoroughly male" companionship, and was disturbed by the suspicious manner in which schoolboys were handled in the dormitories. For two years he lived in a company that never questioned the all-sufficiency of Jesuitism, read no books not permeated with it, and heard its principles repeated as axioms day after day. Still, underneath the obvious level of self-deception and superstition, he sensed the answer to a need that could not be found outside the Church. His attitude could not escape his superiors, and there was some question about allowing him to take his vows.

One can say now that perhaps he never should have done so; but it must be remembered that Tyrrell did not consider his criticism of the Society a criticism of Catholicism. He hoped, in fact, to be the means of some reform within the Jesuit order. And these hopes were not wholly without substance. Tyrrell felt that Leo XIII himself would like to have seen the Society liberalized. At Stonyhurst, as an interpreter of Thomism, Tyrrell became a popular professor, and it was soon apparent that all the best minds among the pupils supported him. Many regarded him as Newman's logical successor as convert-leader.

Tyrrell, however, regarded Newmanism as a middle-of-the-road position that could not permanently be maintained. Instead he received his primary influence from 1897 on from Friedrich von Hügel. Baron von Hügel, a layman, was the most able scholar of his acquaintance, and was a critic Tyrrell much needed. By 1904, from a small Jesuit mission at Richmond, Tyrrell was writing,

The thoughtful Catholic no longer regards [the Church] as a sharp-edged sphere of light walled round with abrupt and impenetrable darkness, but rather as a centre and focus from which the light of religion, spread over all ages and nations, shades away indefinitely and is mingled in varying degrees with that darkness that can never wholly conquer it. We

cannot stand so far from the focus as not to share some measure of its influence, however qualified; in a word, we cannot suffer complete inward spiritual excommunication.⁹

At this point his position with the Jesuits was becoming more and more untenable. The General of the Society asked him to recant some published views of the Jesuits. An exchange of letters followed. Tyrrell, of course, maintained that it was the Society that was false to its original spirit and aims, and that he did not therefore consider himself theologically bound by it. With astute courtesy the Father General firmly rejected the notion that an individual had authority in such matters. A letter Tyrrell had written some two or three years earlier, meant to be private, found its way to publication in Milan. The General now demanded that Father Tyrrell repudiate its contents. Tyrrell could not. To his friend, von Hügel, he even quoted Luther: *Ich kann nicht anders*. So, in February 1906, he was dismissed from the Society of Jesus. He remained a priest, but under suspension and could not say mass.

His hope was that he could quietly remain a secular priest (i.e. one not bound by monastic vows), but he warned that if his censure was to be public, he would owe it to his friends and himself to make his defence public too. In the end his defence was both public and vigorous, but he still hoped to be reinstated as a practising priest. His reasoning seems rather curious. If he were to be reinstated, he would not be allowed to publish his own theological teaching. Therefore, while he was making every effort towards reinstatement, he was simultaneously pressing to get his theological critique, *Through Scylla and Charybdis*, into print before the case was acted on.

While Tyrrell was living in Storrington in 1907, the blow fell from Rome. On 8 September Pope Pius X issued his encyclical, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*. The encyclical was a document of nearly 25,000 words, about three-fourths of it stating what the Modernists believed, and the remainder detailing the Church's condemnation. It was, in effect, the Roman Catholic answer to the "higher criticism". The statements have the ponderous rhetoric of the Vatican, but in substance they are not unlike the orthodox reactions to the "New Theology". The Modernists

degrade Christ to the condition of "a simple and ordinary man". Modernists are agnostics, since in the end they depend upon scientific or historical phenomena for the basis of truth and not on the revelation of the Church. They give undue weight to a vague subconscious sense that they call *vital immanence*. The sense that God is working in man is, says the Pope, irreproachable. But for the Modernists immanence is simply a kind of pantheism. They make distinctions between the Christ of history and the Christ of faith; the Church of history and the Church of faith; the Sacraments of history and the Sacraments of faith. All this is destructive not only of Catholicism, but of religion. "The error of Protestantism made the first step on this path; that of Modernism makes the second; Atheism makes the next."¹⁰

The various Modernists across Europe, although they were not, as the encyclical seemed to indicate, in complete agreement on all these matters, might surely have expected this kind of response from Rome. What they did not expect, and what shocked the entire Church was the severity of the punishment, prescribed for "anyone who in any way is found to be tainted with Modernism". Such people were to be expelled without recourse from Catholic seminaries and universities; moreover, the bishops were directed to prevent whatever "savours" of Modernism from being published or read. The Pope named a "Council of Vigilance" to keep any form of Modernism from the clergy, teachers, and students, and ordered all bishops to submit a special report to the Holy See every three years on the carrying out of these orders. In 1910 an anti-Modernist oath was required of all clergy. Small wonder that the Church historian, Alec Vidler, has called this an ecclesiastical reign of terror.

The *Pascendi* lopped off many unorthodox heads. The reactions varied. Alfred Fawkes, a convert like Tyrrell, was disillusioned and returned to the Church of England.

Fawkes said, "I am not wanted, I will go." Loisy said, "I will go when I am put out." Tyrrell said, "You can't put me out. I stay."¹¹

Of the three positions Tyrrell's was certainly the most extreme, since it was based on an assumption that his own view was the Church's and hence implied that the Vatican was heretical.

Within a month after the encyclical the *Giornale d'Italia* and *The Times* both asked for comment. Tyrrell supplied it at some length, even though talking back to the Pope was an audacious action, and to do so through a Protestant newspaper was unprecedented. But Tyrrell had little to lose, since he must have known he could no longer avoid excommunication except by a complete and abject recantation. Instead he broke into a flurry of writing which included his formal reply to the papal charges (*The Programme of Modernism*) and *Christianity at the Cross-roads*, written at least in part as a reply to the views of Dean Inge, who felt it was dishonest of Tyrrell to remain inside the Church.

The Programme of Modernism was addressed to the Pope, but this, of course, was a rhetorical device, for the tone was not calculated to bring the Holy Father to a more moderate frame of mind:

Before you reject us, before you solemnly bury yourself away in medieval dreams of a political and intellectual theocracy, think for a moment on your responsibility to God, to society, to history, and consider carefully whether your policy of a return to the past may not end in sterilizing the Church of which you are in charge.¹²

Is there in the Catholic Church, Tyrrell wanted to know, a power of conquest or simply a conservative instinct? The Modernists felt that the Church had departed from life. Yet she had not always resisted change. She had been dynamic in shifting, for instance, from the messianic preachings of Christ to the Hellenistic Fathers of the second century, and in bringing the faith of St. Thomas Aquinas into harmony with the thought of his day. The change for which Modernism now asked was not a change of principles, as the Pope seemed to think, but a change in method. The critical method of our own times needed to be applied to religious forms in general and to Catholicism in particular.

Tyrrell spent most of his long essay (again, not really for the edification of Pius X) on a comprehensive review of Bible scholarship and criticism. It was ironic indeed that Tyrrell had now to defend these studies under the programme called "Modernism", when many of them extended back to a half

century before. They lay back of *Essays and Reviews* in 1860. They tempered Moncure Conway's studies through the seventies, and were expounded by Renan from Westminster Abbey in the Hibbert Lectures of 1880. They drove the fictional Robert Elsmere from his Church before 1890. Two years before Tyrrell's work Albert Schweitzer had summed up the entire process of German scholarship and practically put a capstone on it. Still Tyrrell patiently went over once again all the familiar problems, from those presented by the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch to the failure of the Gospels to agree on the balance between Jesus's humanity and his divinity. Tyrrell brought all his considerable scholarship to bear on analyzing the basic documents of the New Testament, showing again and again the inconsistencies, and demanding always of the Church that it provide the larger "inner" consistency without which honest critical thinking must abandon Christianity. To the Pope's stringent measures of repression, Tyrrell cast back the challenge from Acts v.38: "Let these men go free. For if their work be of men it will come to naught, but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found to fight against God."

Contrary to Tyrrell's prediction, the Church nevertheless continued to thrive, attracting even such intellectual converts as G. K. Chesterton. Still the rigidity of Pius X's measures could not be regarded with any gratification by his successors. The Church was hardly the richer for driving out devout men of high scholarship.

As to Tyrrell himself, he survived his condemnation for only twelve months. He lived at Storrington with occasional trips to London. He had the companionship of Maude Petre, with visits from Wilfrid Meynell, Father Fawkes, the Abbé Brémond, and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, who reported on these days in his Diaries. Miss Petre called her place the "Home for the Unhappy". It was like a convent, said Blunt, but prettier. The panelled rooms were white and clean. Behind the house were lawn and garden and a row of buildings looking like a cloister. Tyrrell lived in a dark little ground-floor room. Miss Petre was "a young woman of about thirty-five, plain, but with a pleasant ruddy countenance, and a look of extreme honesty . . . a serious good woman, large minded, but without much humour."¹³

Though he lived in this quiet eighteenth-century atmosphere, and though the time had come for surrender, he was not at peace. "As you may imagine," he wrote Blunt late in 1907,

the air is full of missiles directed at my head, and I am busy dodging them. It is not pleasant yet to my Irish blood not wholly unpleasant. . . . the gain of Rome to the cause of reason and humanity would be so great that one is loath to abandon the effort, at all events I can never admit that I am beaten.¹⁴

Blunt, describing himself as purely materialist, was completely sympathetic with Tyrrell, yet found him, even in his later writings, "petulant and undignified . . . needlessly aggressive". It seemed to Blunt that if Tyrrell had had a less happy life than at Storrington, he would have thrown off his cassock altogether, since he did not believe in ecclesiastical authority enough to worry himself about excommunication. After Tyrrell's death, he revised that opinion. The censured priest had felt the quarrel with Rome far more deeply than appeared on the surface.

Father Tyrrell had been having kidney trouble, afterwards diagnosed as Bright's disease. Severe headaches sometimes kept him in his room for twenty-four hours at a time, but in the intervals he seemed cheerful and lively. Miss Petre did not therefore realize at once the seriousness of his final attack in mid-July of 1909. She stayed beside him for forty-eight hours, and sent for Abbé Brémond to administer the sacraments and give him absolution. A paralytic stroke had taken away his speech.

Maude Petre wrote immediately to *The Times*, announcing his death at the age of forty-eight, and giving the account of the last rites and of Tyrrell's inability to respond. This would save him the posthumous ignominy of any report that he had at last recanted his errors.

Blunt immediately went to Storrington and found the body laid out "in the tiny cell which had been his sleeping place, hardly more than a cupboard. . . . There lay the dead heresiarch, as sad a little shard of humanity as ever my eyes saw." But he had been dressed in surplice and stole and two tapers burned at his head. The materialist, much moved, knelt and recited a "De Profundis" and kissed the hem of the stole.¹⁵

Now came the effort to secure a Catholic burial. The Archbishop Bourne had objected, and when Meynell tried to intervene Bourne had left for Rheims to attend ceremonies connected with the canonization of an earlier heretic, Joan of Arc. The body lay at Storrington for a full week while the case was referred to Rome. Rome said no.

Tyrrell was buried on 21 July. Von Hügel was there with his daughter, Tyrrell's devout disciple. London friends formed a procession of forty or fifty persons. The grave was in the Storrington parish churchyard, not twenty yards from the Catholic chapel—but outside the wall. Abbé Brémond read some funeral prayers in English, and said a few carefully chosen words. Two months later Wilfrid Blunt found no stone marking the grave, but noticed two people praying there.

Dean Inge labelled Tyrrell hot-tempered and indiscreet. Many who agreed with his theology felt that he was presumptuous in his attitude towards the Catholic Church. By his manner and tone he helped to motivate the intransigence with which Rome received the Modernists. Yet he was truly devout, devoted to the Roman dogmas of incarnation, immortality, the sacraments, external worship, and the visible Church. His writings at their best have lucidity and grace and the imprint of a warm humanity. These qualities made him also a memorable teacher and friend. There are those still alive who regard him as a kind of saint.

His life was disturbingly unconsummated. Anyone who peruses it must be forced to wonder if he was not fitted by nature for a far different kind of life than the one he chose—one with more outlets in active living and less in theological pursuits. It must often have occurred to him, too. "I think, with bitterness, how I let the substance of life escape me in the pursuit of shadows."¹⁶

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One would suppose that of all the religious sects in the Western world, the ones best prepared to meet the social and scientific challenge of the late nineteenth century would be those which had strong traditions of social reform and slight dependence on creedal orthodoxy. Both Quakers and Unitarians met these qualifications, yet both were latecomers to the revolution, and furnished, in England at least, no major leadership before the advent of World War I.

The Society of Friends had no inevitable quarrel with Darwin. Though they revered the Scriptures, they had never placed the Bible at the centre of their faith, and were not (as young Moncure Conway found at Sandy Spring) committed to the doctrine of atonement. They had a tradition of over two hundred years, going back through Elizabeth Fry and William Penn, of regarding social reform in a religious light. John Wilhelm Rowntree reminded them that they were not "bound by a heritage of creeds, and need not break with their great past to put themselves in touch with the present".¹ As their historian and latter-day prophet, Rufus Jones, was to record later:

While old systems, built on tradition, were being shaken and all doctrines resting on scribal or scholastic authority were being threatened, Friends could rest with confidence upon a religious basis that was always open to verification and demonstration. They did not need to alter their fundamental point of view in order to accept the implications of the modern methods of scientific research. . . . Man, they insisted, was religious primarily, not because extraordinary events had happened in a remote past, but because his deepest inner life is unsundered from God, and therefore he is essentially more than a finite being.²

But Quakers are accustomed to call the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth centuries their period of *quietism*, in which many of them had withdrawn from the world to lead a Godly life. Quietism was never universal within the Society, and there

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were notable stirrings of life from mid-century on, but they stirred very little outside the Society itself. J. S. Rowntree's prize essay in 1859, for example, on "Quakerism Past and Present" shook the London Yearly Meeting to a degree, but did not open the Society to the thousands of seeking Londoners who found themselves unable to continue their spiritual lives within the old strictures of Calvinist, Anglican, or Roman traditions. And by the time "Three Friends"³ published *A Reasonable Faith* in 1884 (which was attacked in the Yearly Meeting of the following year), the burgeoning Secularist movements and the radical Christian Socialists within the Anglican Church had already captured the more vigorous rebels. Indeed Friends were in no position to compete in the new social and intellectual movements before their Manchester Conference in 1895.

For Quakers this tardiness must be considered disastrous. For many who were drawn into other orbits, eventually to be left without a satisfactory spiritual home, Quakerism, properly understood, might have been equally acceptable and more lasting. Instead, throughout decades of inaction, they continued to be "well thought of". Almost all the religious leaders had pleasantly flattering things to say about them. "I shall never forget," Charles Kingsley wrote in 1870, "that while both Church of England and Calvinists were forgetting it, the Early Friends preached the broad gospel of humanity, and acted up to His own preaching by being foremost in all good works."⁴ Reginald Campbell gave Friends credit for a subtle kind of sacramentalism:

I have often thought that the Society of Friends, which professes to be the least sacramental of all Nonconformist bodies, is in reality more sacramental in its susceptibilities than any of them. All the Quakers I ever knew have illustrated this. Their habit of stillness, listening and expectant, renders them sensitively responsive to all higher influences through whatsoever media they may come.⁵

But much as they might admire the Quakers, the reformers did not really count on them for much support. They were too conservative. As G. J. Holyoake observed:

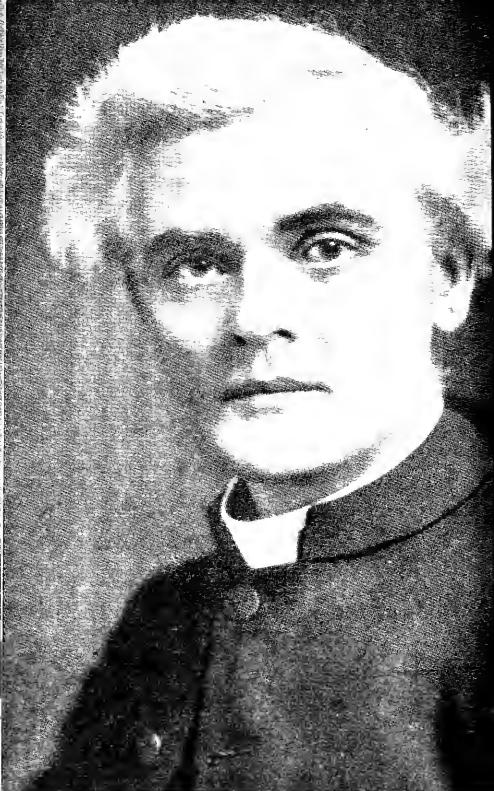
Quakers ask protection from power; they never seek to subvert power. Their doctrine of non-resistance makes them the natural allies of monarchs. Penn had the ear of Charles II. Edmundson had ready audience of King James. Shillitoe prayed with the Emperor of Russia, who knelt by Shillitoe's side. Quakers were not spies against freedom, but honest reporters of wrong done, whose honest impartial word kings could trust.⁶

The Salvation Army considerably shook up the Quietist Friends. In 1879 two of General Booth's lasses arrived in the Quaker stronghold of Darlington where Friends had always dealt charitably with the lower classes. They looked on agape as more than 2,000 fellow citizens packed into Livingston Hall nightly to listen to the "Hallelujah Lasses". The historian Halevy credits the blare of General Booth's bands and the shouts of his preachers with rousing the Quakers from their slumber. Compared to the Salvation Army workers, the Quakers were "extremely enlightened and well informed", but they constituted, among the Free Churches, "an aristocracy, practically speaking hereditary, a little Church, silent, almost devoid of dogma or cult, but a Church in which their very absence threatened to degenerate into a rigid formalism".⁷ Inglis also remarks on the scarcity of the poor among them, and their tendency to be content merely in preserving their own fellowship. "The Quakers . . . were possibly the only religious body whose numbers actually declined during the century," he records. "It keeps out millions," the most eminent Friend of the era, John Bright, said of his own Society.⁸

The Secularists viewed the nineteenth-century Quakers with a suspicion of hypocrisy. Harriet Law, asking why there were no real Christians at large, wrote,

The Quakers, it is true, have tried to put into force a modified form of the oft-repeated injunction "Resist not evil"; and by systematic contravention of another less authoritative command ("Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth") have managed to keep themselves in existence; but they exist (like the smaller European nationalities) under the protection, and





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for the convenience, of the more efficient members of the body politic, who act upon an entirely different principle.⁹

In the early days of the Secularist movement, there was, as one would expect, little contact between the infidels and the Quaker "aristocracy". There is however a record, as early as 1868, of Charles Bradlaugh's speaking at Friends' Institute at Bishopsgate Street. The Friends did not know who Bradlaugh was. A Quaker acquaintance of Bradlaugh invited him to come and speak on the Irish question. At that time Bradlaugh, still writing under the name of "Iconoclast", was not the familiar figure he was to become later. Still, it speaks for the sheltered condition of the Bishopsgate Friends that they listened to his proposals for Ireland with great respect, and invited him to come back with more data at a future discussion. The "guilty" Friend who made the arrangement later confided to Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner:

After the meeting was over and your Father had shaken hands with me and gone, the members crowded round me to inquire who the eloquent visitor was. When they found it was the, at that time, notorious Iconoclast, you may imagine their feelings were of a mixed sort. And I got into disgrace for introducing him. That I did not mind, and I secretly enjoyed their confusion. However, the result was that the Secretary of the Society was ordered to write to your Father and tell him he was not required to attend again.¹⁰

Even at the end of the century, Friends were censured for not being socially aware enough, except, possibly, in support of the peace movement. "It is difficult to understand," wrote a correspondent to *The Friend* (London), "how any who believe a collective following of Christ to be as possible as an individual one should be satisfied with the present industrial and commercial system and its results."¹¹

No doubt some of the conservatism that clung to the image of Quakers in the Victorian era stemmed from their most famous political figure, John Bright. Bright, himself, whose long career ended in 1889, certainly had stepped out of Quietism. His involvement in politics, in addition to his florid oratory, earned him a good deal of scepticism from quieter Friends; but he

turned on them some of his famous eloquence, and once came within a hair's breadth of eliciting applause in Yearly Meeting (where, according to a memoir of the times, his defence of his position on the Corn Laws was followed by "a slight tapping noise"!)¹²

Bright was a Gladstonian Liberal, and Ausubel classes him with Gladstone and Disraeli as one of the three political giants of the late Victorians. We should still consider him "liberal" in his support of free trade, a cheap Press, disestablishment, and the extension of the franchise. But Holyoake judged him a Tory at heart, since he was, at bottom, for the Crown, the Bible, and the Constitution. Economically, too, he defended *laissez-faire*, though he was appalled by human suffering and exploitation of any kind. He owned a cotton mill at Rochdale, and was on the best of terms with his employees, often stopping to talk with them, but fully avoiding subjects like politics or religion where their views might prove embarrassing. He gave support to the Co-operative movement but not, of course, to any form of Socialism.

For such mildly progressive and pacifist views he was pilloried by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, in the poem, *Maud*:

This broad-brimmed hawker of holy things,
Whose ear is crammed with his cotton, and rings
Even in dreams to the chink of his pence,
This huckster put down war!

But even his political opponents took exception to such a picture. Certainly few manufacturers dreamed less of "the chink of pence" than Bright did. Nor did his business interests ever "cram his ear" against the public good. Tennyson's attack was prompted by Bright's outspoken opposition to the Crimean War (1854-56), an issue on which he split with his leader, Gladstone, and made himself highly unpopular. But there were those who appreciated his independence. G. J. Holyoake dedicated the second volume of his *History of Co-operation* to Bright. The Secularist recognized that "the Quaker gets from his self-chosen faith self-sufficiency, concentration, and force, and to this Bright owed his simplicity, directness, and massiveness of speech."¹³ And this completed the popular stereotype of a "Quaker".

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Impressive as it was, it did not attract new blood into the Society. Quakers' alarm over their own dwindling status was one of the prevalent nineteenth-century concerns of the Society. According to J. S. Rowntree, writing at the end of the century, their spiritual energies were divided among: reverence towards the Society itself; doctrinal divisions; rather generalized philanthropy; increasing interest in politics and business.¹⁴

This dormant position of Quakerism had led Caroline Emelia Stephen, in 1890, to publish a memorable little book called *Quaker Strongholds*. She wrote it to explain Quakerism to non-Quakers, but what makes the book of particular consequence in retrospect is its brief, moving introduction, because it recounts her own "convincement" (in Quaker terminology) some seventeen years before, and in so doing voices the dissatisfaction of thousands with formal worship in the Anglican Church,

. . . not for want of appreciation of its unrivalled richness and beauty, but from doubts of the truth of its doctrines. . . . The more vividly one feels the force of its eloquence, the more, it seems to me, one must hesitate to adopt it as the language of one's soul, and the more unlikely it is that such heights and depths of feeling as it demands should be ready to fill its magnificent channels every Sunday at a given hour. The questionings with which at that period I was painfully struggling were stirred into redoubled activity by the dogmatic statements and assumptions with which the Liturgy abounds, and its unbroken flow left no loophole for the utterance of my own less disciplined, but to myself far more urgent, cries for help.

What kept other such people from discovering Friends?

The notorious disinclination of Friends to any attempt at proselytizing, and perhaps some lingering effects of persecution, probably account for the very common impression that Friends' meetings are essentially private—mysterious gatherings into which it would be intrusive to seek admission. Many people, indeed, probably suppose (if they think about it at all) that such meetings are no longer held; that the Society is fast dying out, and the "silent worship" of tradition is a thing of the past—impracticable, and hardly to be seriously mentioned in these days of breathless activity.¹⁵

In this one instance, at least, the barriers were overcome and the writer found herself at length

one of a small company of silent worshippers, who were content to sit down together without words, that each one might feel after and draw near to the Divine Presence, unhindered at least, if not helped, by any human utterance. Utterance I knew was free, should the words be given; and before the meeting was over, a sentence or two were uttered in great simplicity by an old and apparently untaught man, rising in his place amongst the rest of us. I did not pay much attention to the words he spoke and I have no recollection of their purport. My whole soul was filled with the unutterable peace of the undisturbed opportunity for communion with God, with the sense that at last I had found a place where I might, without the faintest suspicion of insincerity, join with others in simply seeking His presence. . . . I cannot but believe that what has helped me so unspeakably might be helpful to multitudes in this day of shaking all that can be shaken, and of restless inquiry after spiritual good.¹⁶

Caroline Stephen was something of a controversial figure among orthodox Friends, because she was forthright enough in her seeking to admit that: "it is not Quakerism but truth that I desire to serve and to promote; the sect may no longer be what is needed, and may be destined to extinction for aught I know."¹⁷ This may have sounded dangerously like the Secular motto, "There is no religion higher than the truth"; but it was precisely the point of view needed to attract earnest and intelligent rebels from the old faiths. If a Quaker leader of stature had come before the public with Caroline Stephen's views twenty years earlier, the response might have affected the cultural sequel of the era. As it was, the hordes who followed the more radical paths away from orthodoxy found little to hold them together or inspire them when the great leaders had vanished.

As these movements waned with the end of the Edwardian Age, Socialist Percy Dearmer urged a revival of the Quaker movement from his pulpit at Christ Church. The enthusiasm of the inner light, lost for so long, he thought was re-emerging. Friends had been at the heart of everything that was most

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strenuous, most serviceable, most Christian. They were particularly right in their Peace testimony. At their best, they were people separate from the world, but still in it. They were needed.¹⁸

Quakers' reputation for social service work of a non-revolutionary character was well earned. Their missions and settlements were not as dynamic or evangelistic in nature as the Salvation Army's, but their work was steady and effective. In projects such as the Bedford Institute, Quakers were often in a minority in the work they sponsored. They conducted tent meetings, ran a "coffee palace" for railway workers who were stranded between train assignments, helped in maintaining convalescent homes, evening schools, invalid kitchens, libraries, nurses' training, peace societies. And they were especially close to the temperance movement. "Converts" were not their main concern.¹⁹

The drive to move away from a philanthropic view of social service to a more comprehensive study of social conditions was led by John Wilhelm Rowntree, who, in spite of the late hour, gave promise of furnishing the Society with dynamic and forward-looking leadership. Tragically, this man of great spirit faced from early youth the gradual loss of the sensory world. He was told that he would be totally blind by middle age. He was already seriously deaf. In his thirties his memory, too, began to fail him. He died in 1905 at thirty-six.

Even in so brief a life he did more than any of his contemporaries to force Quakerism out of its quietistic complacency and into an acceptance of the modern world. He was not, however, strictly a part of the London scene, except in so far as his influence was felt throughout the London Yearly Meeting—the Quaker designation for the inclusive membership of all the smaller meetings in the London area. Indeed it was Rowntree who successfully advocated holding occasional "Yearly Meetings" in the provinces, where the Quakers were in a stronger position than in the metropolis, thus breaking a precedent of 225 years.

Though from a long and distinguished line of Quaker ancestors, and though reared and educated as a Friend, Rowntree came to his faith, like many of his elders, after a long struggle

with agnosticism, and emerged with a kind of liberal evangelism. He was much disturbed that Quakers were so behind-hand in the religious and social revolution of the day. He complained that

. . . for the last fifty years the Society of Friends, so far from leading as it did in the seventeenth century, has been an unintelligent spectator of the greatest revolution in religious thought since the time of the Reformation. . . . Fundamental issues, centred in the heart of the Christian faith, are raised, fought out in reviews back and forth before the public eye. . . . But more than this, there is a notable stirring of the social conscience. The existing order is challenged. Poverty in its hideous shape is regarded not as a fixed institution but as a social disease, an evil too great to be borne. That many should suffer a stunted life while a few enjoy the freedom of wealth and leisure is a contradiction of brotherhood that cannot be glozed over by the application of a few stock platitudes. . . . Those who have abandoned the doctrine of an infallible Church and have been driven out of their last defence—the doctrine of an infallible Book—must face the final issue of faith. The hour of their supreme trial is at hand, that which the Reformation foreshadows and [George] Fox almost saw.²⁰

Like Caroline Stephen, Rowntree felt that Friends had something special to contribute to these probings, but were failing to rise to the occasion. Rowntree was himself one of those men who turn physical limitations into inner strength. He was a moving speaker and a self-appointed apostle of unity in the Society on both sides of the Atlantic. Fortunately, his income from the cocoa works at York allowed him to spend a good portion of his brief quota of time towards these ends.

On the last of numerous journeys to America, John Wilhelm Rowntree died in New York from pneumonia, which he had contracted on board ship. At his bedside was his friend and disciple (though five years his elder), Rufus Jones. Jones was perhaps the greatest legacy Rowntree left, for he did much, during the period of World War I and after, to establish Friends in the social and religious position Rowntree had advocated.

If a point were to be designated which marked British Friends'

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entrance into the modern world, the most meaningful date would probably be that of the Manchester Conference in November 1895. This conference, proposed by the Home Mission Committee at Yearly Meeting earlier in the same year, was meant "to dispel the ignorance that, more or less, exists in the public mind with regard to the principles and practices of the Society, and to strengthen the attachment of its younger members to its works".²¹

The gatherings took place from the 11th of November to the 15th, inclusive, and attendance varied from 1,000 to 1,300. It had a "good Press"—and not only in religious publications. Both conservative and liberal wings were in evidence, but the attention of the outside world was focused chiefly upon the atmosphere of self-criticism, and the willingness of Quakers to listen, at least, to the advanced positions of Bible criticism and social responsibility. The *Independent* concluded: "To a certain extent some of the angularities which have marked the religious status of Friends have been worn down as their intercourse with other professing Christians has extended. But the individualism which lies at the foundation of their creed has survived from generation to generation."²² Friends were themselves revolting against their own narrowness. William Charles Braithwaite spoke of Friends' being a "recluse church". He said that while Friends had always been pioneers in modern science, they had until recently "repressed all taste for the fine arts. These, at their greatest, always contain some revelation of the spirit of God and advance that glory by their service."²³

Rowntree, then only twenty-seven, criticized his elders on three counts: their growing materialism, their failure to revitalize their religious thought, and their failure to expand their social ideals. There is no doubt that Friends were faced at this conference with the theological problems arising from evolution, the age of science, and the newer investigations into the reliability of the Scriptures. One gathers from the nature of the reporting that some Friends may have been seriously faced with them for the first time. Yet the speakers presented nothing in the least new. Nor did any of them speak with clear authority. Compared to much of the lively debate that had been going on in print and on platforms throughout London for the past two

decades, Friends heard only rather warmed-over, slipshod generalities. For many of the older Friends this was apparently more than enough.

On the social question they were somewhat better prepared. Poverty and slum conditions were already known to them, and there was consensus that the Poor Laws were inadequate. But there was sharp division as to remedies. There was revolt against "theorizers" and praise for the paternalism of such model employers as Krupp in Germany. To many, some larger measure of philanthropy still seemed the only respectable solution. On the other hand, Edward Grubb gave a talk bordering on Christian Socialism, and Joseph Taylor declared, "If Quakerism is to be carried into the world it must be spoken in the open air with our Socialist brethren on the steps of Town Hall."²⁴ But the name of Karl Marx or Henry George, or even of Stewart Headlam was not mentioned.

On the subject of war, it is hard to read Samuel James Capper's remarks without a sense of irony. "We are in a time of profound peace, so far as Europe is concerned, and have practically been so for twenty or twenty-five years, and yet the preparations for war are causing a degree of misery, such as I believe never was felt in the world before in time of peace." Yet they had Lord Salisbury's word that the great powers were combining "to do away with the armed peace which is crushing the industry of the world".²⁵

The Manchester Conference of 1895 was a public exchange as opposed to the esoteric exchange of a Yearly Meeting. There can be little doubt that in spite of its timidities it was a breakthrough for the Society, preparing Friends for the role they were to play at the onset of World War I, and readying sympathetic non-Friends for the reception of such a role. It did not place Friends in the forefront of religious thought or social action in the 1890s.

Once the Conference had passed into history, it was soon apparent that new forces had been set loose. In September 1897, the first Summer School of Theology was convened at Scarborough. It seems to have been called to deal specifically with the Higher Criticism in a more thorough manner than was possible at Manchester. It had no official Quaker sanction, but

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was called on the initiative of thirty-three individual Friends. It was intended for a more limited and specialized participation than Manchester; even so, there were seven hundred in attendance.

Almost at the turn of the century a few young Quakers formed the Socialist Quaker Society (SQS) which was a sort of Guild of St. Matthew in miniature. Six years later, in 1904, liberal Quakers were forced to do what liberal Anglicans had done—form a larger, somewhat more conservative society to keep the more radical group in hand. The Friends Social Union was the smaller counterpart of the Christian Social Union. The SQS never had more than about fifty members, but it persisted into World War I. It published a series of seven Tracts, and generally made its position felt at Yearly Meetings. In addition, beginning in 1912, SQS published a few issues of a magazine called *The Ploughshare*.

They were obviously under the influence of Headlam. Their purpose, they claimed, was to show that Socialism was essentially a Christian movement. But they were Quakers first, and “under a living concern to know the divine will concerning the social problems”. The core of Jesus’s message was Socialist, and the Society of Friends “in its very form is a Socialist organization”. They recommended Fabian tracts, and engaged Fabian speakers—specifically Fabian Secretary, E. R. Pease, whose own background was Quaker. In the Yearly Meeting of 1913 the SQS proposed a minute asking members to “remember how close is the association between improper commercial conditions and the great social evils which we all deplore”. They asked that local meetings discuss this topic and report back to SQS. From this request a total of twenty-seven special meetings were arranged, each dealing with a different aspect of the Socialist position. But *The Ploughshare* had to print the reluctant conclusion: “We cannot find any widespread appreciation of the importance of Socialism or any general acceptance of its principles amongst members of the Society of Friends”.²⁶

As in the Church of England, the Social Union achieved wider acceptance and secured support from the more weighty members: B. Seebohm Rowntree was chairman, George Cadbury, Jr., treasurer, Percy Alden, M.P., was secretary for a time.

These Friends did not espouse Socialism, but stated as their object, "to evoke the spirit of justice and of social service, and to apply our religious faith consistently to our social and civil life". Obviously they had less trouble than SQS in obtaining money for their various projects. Their method was to split into multiple work-groups, each of which was to report back to an annual meeting. They published leaflets on "The Housing Problem", "Child Life and Labour", and "How to Form a Social Service Committee". J. Ramsay MacDonald addressed their annual meeting in 1911 on "The Spiritual Aspects of the Social Problem". The SQS censured the FSU quite openly for not getting down to the workers' level, and for shrinking from a full commitment. But the Union remained a going concern into the War years.

It would be interesting to compare, if that were possible, the amount of good accomplished by both of these groups with the benevolent exploits of a single "concerned" Friend. George Cadbury, who, with his brother, Richard, had taken over a failing small cocoa business and made it a source of great wealth, was at the time of the Manchester Conference and the Scarborough Institute deeply involved in his own solution to the problem of urban blight. He had moved his plant out of the atmosphere of Birmingham in 1878 and was, twenty years later, attracting international attention with the first of the "garden cities", Bournville. Here, in a well-planned community, every worker owned his own home and garden on liberal payment terms, went to work in clean clothes, and sent his children to endowed public schools. By the 1920s Bournville consisted of 1,100 houses for about 5,500 people. The Garden City movement was pursued most vigorously by Ebenezer Howard and spread throughout England before World War I.

Cadbury also put his wealth and energies to work in the campaign for peace. The outbreak of the Boer War drove John Wilhelm Rowntree to exclaim in despair, "The whole affair is so sickening that it is working upon me like a nightmare. At times I almost wish I were not an Englishman."²⁷ Cadbury, meanwhile, after conferring with Lloyd George, quietly bought up the *Daily News* of London as a lonely opposition voice among the daily papers. Cadbury, on traditional Quaker principles,

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rejected all racing news and liquor advertising. In consequence he carried the venture at a continuous loss. He had no background in journalism, but he stubbornly persisted in the new career of his old age until, at the age of seventy-one, he had control of seven newspapers in London and Birmingham. Then, in 1910, he formed a *Daily News* Trust, and left the power of "the Cocoa Press" (as his detractors had called it) in younger hands.²⁸

Except for Cadbury, the "Stop the War Committee" was not headed by Friends, but, as we shall see, by W. T. Stead, who nearly bankrupted himself in the process.

Although the Society of Friends awoke too late to the social and religious upheaval which their own founder had anticipated by some two centuries, and though they failed to provide leadership that could compete with the more notable London heretics of the times, they were permitted, in retrospect, one compensation. World War I, which was the graveyard of the remnants of the popular heretical movements, roused them to a valiant resistance to conscription, and became for them the crucible out of which both the British Friends' Service Council and the American Friends' Service Committee emerged. These were new concepts of socio-religious organization, and carried with them the consciousness of a revived mission.

The late-century Unitarians were at least as bourgeois as the Quakers, with little real interest in evangelizing the masses.²⁹ Their sophistication in affairs of the world came earlier, and this led in general to a greater expectation of support from them in liberal causes. They did indeed take a leading position for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws after the *Freethinker* trials in 1882; and some of them gave support to Bradlaugh in his parliamentary struggle. But Mrs. Bonner complained that in person the Unitarians "always seemed to treat Freethinkers with an acrimony special to themselves and us". Nor would they handle *The National Reformer* in their bookstores.³⁰

The intrepid Charles Maurice Davies was puzzled by the state of Unitarianism in 1874. He found in London samples of "Advanced", "Moderate", and "Ritualistic Unitarianism". The Advanced congregation was in a hired hall (St. George's); the

Moderates in an "iron church"—a prefabricated metal structure—in Kensington; the Ritualists were in a Gothic church in Islington, complete with stained-glass window, altar, and academic gown. "Had he only put on a little green and gold and thrown in a genuflection here and there on the altar steps, we might have fancied ourselves in any Ritualistic church in London."³¹

Unity Church, on which Davies was reporting, had been transplanted from the Chapel in Carter's Lane; and that in turn had been in existence for nearly 200 years. Unitarian origins were in seventeenth-century Socinianism and in the Stuart Restoration when the New Act of Uniformity (1662) drove two thousand clergymen, many of them Presbyterians, to resign their pulpits. By 1870 there were in the London district twenty-six Unitarian churches with a combined average attendance of about 2,500. The movement had grown from a Unitarian Society, founded in 1791, under the leadership of Theophilus Lindsey, a clergyman who had left the Established Church in the battle for religious liberty. There were laws against anti-Trinitarianism in those days, but by 1813 sufficient feeling was aroused to have them repealed, and thereafter the name "Unitarian" could be used more freely. John MacKinnon Robertson gives 1825 as the date of the actual founding of the sect, when the merger of the British and foreign Unitarian Associations was effected. The Unitarians themselves claim a longer history. In any case it was 1850 when the London District Unitarian Society was founded with its object as "the diffusion of that which they believe to be the truths taught by Christ and his apostles as contained in the Holy Scriptures".³² The Rev. Robert Spears in the sixties conducted a Unitarian revival and edited the *Christian Life and Unitarian Herald* and the *Christian Freeman*. William Ellery Channing and James Martineau were the liberalizing influences through the nineteenth century which brought Unitarians to the place where they could say,

We claim a higher authority than either Church or Bible. We seek with reverence in all the scriptures of the world, in the finest expressions of man's thought, aspiration and devotion, in our own individual and corporate spiritual experience for revelation of the nature and purpose of God.³³

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Unitarians, however, always covered a wide theological spectrum, and the debate within their own Society was often sharp. The "Bible Unitarians" regularly attacked the Agnosticism rampant in Unitarian pulpits. The drift was certainly to the left. South Place Chapel supplied many of the significant elements when W. J. Fox was in his prime there. Their membership drew heavily from the scientific professions—their guiding light in the previous century had been the chemist, Joseph Priestley. They earned a reputation of being the least bigoted of any Nonconformist group, "rational, individualistic, unregimented."³⁴

In 1876 Francis William Newman, in an opposite reaction to his brother, John Henry, asked admission to the Unitarians, after hesitating while a convocation made the decision to accept the works of Theodore Parker for circulation. "You know me well enough to be aware that I love the spirit of Christianity, while I cannot admit its letter," he wrote. He saw in Unitarianism, as many did, a possible bridge between the Old and the New which might avert another convulsion such as accompanied the Reformation.³⁵

Unitarianism was a bridge in quite another and less satisfactory sense. It was the road, taken by increasing numbers, from Orthodoxy to Freethought, who paused only long enough to break the journey. Most notable of such travellers was, of course, Moncure Conway, who carried South Place Chapel away from Unitarianism with him. Conway was, however, grateful for such a "bridge". Looking back he called Unitarianism "a religion all the more potent perhaps because illogical".

As an organized sect Unitarianism never amounted to much, because the conglomeration of ideals, sentiments and moral forces related to it was too vast for any such enclosure. The revolutions of the last century were Unitarian revolutions. . . . Theologically Unitarianism has always been weak and timid, but on the moral and human side its strength has been repeatedly proved.

He went on to observe that in America the Unitarian organization, small as it was, did more to emancipate the slaves than all the other Churches combined.³⁶

On the moral and human side in London, Unitarians were consistently involved. A group calling themselves "Neo-Unitarians" collaborated in the "Settlement" in Tavistock Place—a project which grew out of the ideal projected at the end of *Robert Elsmere*, and probably financed in part by Mrs. Humphry Ward. "But," says Robertson, "the scheme lapsed into one of social service only hazily distinguished from institutions ecclesiastically managed."³⁷

But the Unitarians must be mentioned especially for one final project of great imagination, even though it has little to do with the London scene, and even though it did not survive the Wars—at least in its original form. If it had succeeded it would have changed the aspect of religious liberalism everywhere.

Charles William Wendte, an American Unitarian minister, addressed the Boston Unitarian Club on 10 January 1900 on "Liberal Christianity in England and Germany" and thereby launched an international movement of religious liberals. On 30 May 1901 the First Congress of the International Council of Unitarian and Other Religious Liberals met in Boston with about seven hundred present including representatives from twenty-eight foreign countries. The Socialist, Graham Wallas, was a principal speaker. There followed five more biennial conferences in Amsterdam, Geneva, Boston, Cologne and Berlin, and Paris before they were overtaken by the outbreak of war. Attendance of paid delegates grew to over two thousand, thirty nationalities, sixty religious sects. At public meetings audiences sometimes reached four thousand. The meetings lasted two weeks, and there were nearly 150 speakers programmed. The Fourth Congress in Boston was the most important and largest gathering of religious liberals ever held.

There was never any attempt to found a new Church, but the implications of these gatherings on a possible *rapprochement* among the congregations of the religious left are impossible to assess. The subtle changes of name are in themselves significant: "International Council of Unitarian and Other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers", "The International Congress of Free Christians and Other Religious Liberals", "Congress of Religious Liberals". The general tenor of all the meetings was an acceptance of a non-divine Jesus, a "Modernist" view of

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scriptural criticism, humanitarianism, stronger bonds with non-Christian sects, especially Mahometans. In Geneva, where the gathering was referred to in the Press as "The Congress of Heretics", any attempt to issue a declaration of religious principles was very sensibly dropped as impossible. Social issues included temperance, pacifism, women's rights, and—of course—Socialism. At least in some instances the proceedings were published.

Even the 1913 Conference in Paris, though chilled by the climate of international relations, reflected hope. Wendte's report said,

Everywhere we find the same issues: a passionate search for truth, aroused consciences, abandonment or modification of antiquated dogmas, re-wording of the principles of religious belief and enlarged comprehension of the universality of religious inspiration.³⁸

But attendance was down.

Responding to the All-India Congress of Theists, Wendte had lined up a delegation of Western Theists—Unitarian, Universalist, Liberal Quaker, Jewish Reform, etc.—who were to journey around the world in a group as a kind of œcumenical leavening. The trip was scheduled for the autumn of 1914. The War not only made the trip impossible; it made future congresses impossible as well. This unique and promising organization has never recovered from the blow, but it does survive.

Dr. Wendte arranged for a Congress in Boston in 1920; the response was a disappointment. At the age of seventy-six he withdrew from leadership. The Association has weathered the decades since World War I and maintains a secretariat in The Hague under the present name of International Association for Liberal Christianity and Religious Freedom (IARF). It retains member groups in seventeen countries, and publishes pamphlets in several languages.

INDEPENDENT SEEKERS AND THE VIEW AHEAD

Throughout our survey of London heretics we have been concerned necessarily with men in relation to movements. Many a person during these years must have wandered from Society to Guild, from Congregation to Fellowship, never lighting anywhere long enough to be identified. Two such figures are so persistent, and in their own right so influential, that they have already woven their personalities into the pattern of this book. Their omnipresence may have seemed to provide some tenuous coherence to the disparateness of rebellious churches and radical lecture halls. William T. Stead and Bernard Shaw were both in their own ways such incurable reformers and such compulsive meddlers that few London groups calling themselves "progressive" did not know them. Shaw alone has so completely described every twist and turn of interest in a flood of correspondence, prefaces, recorded speeches, and letters-to-the-editor that the time may come when readers will assume that he invented the Edwardian Age.

Besides these two there were those who would wish to be counted among the activists, but whose health or temperaments inhibited them. There was Wilfred Scawen Blunt, for example, and, more especially, H. G. Wells.

The influence of Wells on the heretical spirits before and after World War I was both extensive and deep, and had he been equipped to withstand the physical and nervous strain he would surely have chosen to remain in the city and in the centre of the political and religious turmoil. As it was, he maintained a persuasive dominance through the printed word, and his "New Republicanism" was a strong factor in many of the gatherings where he was personally never in attendance.

Wells's poverty was more real than either Shaw's or Stead's. He first came to London in 1884, at the age of eighteen, as a

prizewinner in science, to study at London University's Normal School of Science where he was much impressed with Huxley. Uncomfortable in a celluloid collar and a red tie—symbols of his bourgeois pretensions—he never felt part of university life, though he did achieve some success as a debater before he failed his examinations in 1887 and retired to a small Welsh town as an underpaid teacher. From here a crushed kidney and a burst blood vessel of the lungs sent him back home, apparently to die. He had by this time sold one story to a magazine, and his slow convalescence became the emergence of the writer.

Out of a delayed puberty and youthful frustrations he developed a highly individualistic style of alternating humour and savagery. When he returned to London he returned also to a permanently unsatisfactory love affair with his cousin, Isabel, whom he eventually married in 1891. The real union of his life, however, was with Catherine Robbins, for whom he abandoned Isabel in 1894, though the lovers had but fifty pounds between them. They were married the following year and she remained his faithful "Jane" till her death in 1927. It is hardly surprising, then, that he was thirty before he began to move into literary society, and it was 1898 before he could travel in Italy. In 1900 he moved into his own home ("Spade House") between Folkestone and Sandgate, by the sea.

Wells's reputation was made out of his utopian visions. Much of his later work might be found in embryo in the early paper he read to the Debating Society of South Kensington on "The Past and the Future of the Human Race", later published as *The Man of the Year Million* (1893). His visions, such as *New Worlds for Old*, were scientific, but, like many of our more contemporary counterparts, often foreboding. He was not a "good" socialist in either the Marxian or Fabian sense. Socialism was for him a state of mind, or rather a state of being, more pervasive than any socio-political movement. His incursion into the Fabian Society in 1903 brought him as close to practical political involvement as he was ever to come, but it was marked for failure. Though he had come to respect Shaw and the Fabians, he always fancied, at least, that he was "aware of Shaw's secret disapproval" of him. His critical paper, "Faults of the Fabian", scored the Society for failure to "organize, develop, or represent the spirit of social

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reconstruction that is arising all about us".¹ He could not dislodge the prime movers of the Society, and after a humiliating defeat he gradually disengaged himself. He remained a stirring prophet of the coming Age of Science, apologist for female liberation and free love, and an increasingly perceptive novelist of the psychological dilemmas of his own time.

In his own way he was as independent a heretic as either Shaw or Stead. He was always "spoiling for a fight". Yet it was not alone his unending battle against ill health and shyness that kept him from the London arena. Like many of his heroes, he harboured a hidden guilt about his fear of plunging directly into the turbulence of life.² Consequently, though his mind was more subtle and far-reaching than Stead's, and his influence as pervasive among the younger minds as Shaw's, he left actual participation in the fray to them.

But Shaw and Stead were not a team. They rarely saw each other and, according to Shaw never spoke over the three decades when they were both in London, but they communicated occasionally. Stead indirectly gave Shaw needed assistance in the beginning of his journalistic career. William Archer, who had been reviewing for Stead's *Pall Mall Gazette*, steered some of the reviewing Shaw's way in 1886, and this led to a continuing association of Shaw with the *Gazette*. After the Bloody Sunday riot of 1887, Annie Besant remained their mutual friend. Stead was not in the actual march, but he helped raise bail and was part of Linnell's funeral. Afterwards he helped found the Law and Liberty League and co-edited, with Annie, its short-lived organ, *The Link*. GBS supported Stead's attack on the slums, but never forgave him for the "put-up job" of *The Maiden Tribute*.³ Nevertheless Shaw later advised the easy-going T. P. O'Connor of *The Star* to make himself, for the sake of good journalism, as hated as Stead was. At the turn of the century Shaw and Stead worked together in uneasy tandem in the "International Peace Crusade" though, as usual, their aims were not identical.⁴

Stead was completely anti-theatre for years, and Shaw failed consistently to get him to attend. Eventually in his fifty-fifth year Stead was lured into the theatre by the actress, Elizabeth Robins. Quite in character, he made great news of his conver-

sion, and thereafter published his reactions to any plays he saw in his *Review of Reviews*. For the most part he praised Shaw's plays highly—*John Bull's Other Island*, *Candida*, and *Major Barbara*. The latter he thought had "the pathos of Gethsemane, the tragedy of Calvary". He compared it with the Passion Play of Oberammergau—one of the few plays he had previously seen. Shaw was not flattered. He thought the Passion Play dull stuff, and did not respect Stead's views on artistic matters.

He was a gifted journalist, but a complete Philistine, to whom literature was not a fine art but simply news. He was as ignorant as it is possible for a newspaper man in possession of his five senses to be on art, science, philosophy: in short, of literature.⁵

Stead's puritanical notions of the inherent wickedness of the theatre and its people were, he admitted, deeply ingrained, and, at the outset of his theatrical adventure, he expressed his concern as to whether the theatre was a power making for righteousness. A slight slur on the morality of actresses produced the following sample of Shavian invective:

What do you mean, you foolish William Stead, by an immoral actress? I will take you into any church you like, and show you gross women who are visibly gorged with every kind of excess, with coarse voices and bloated features, to whom money means unrestrained gluttony and marriage unrestrained sensuality; but against whose characters—whose "purity" as you call it—neither you nor their pastors dare level a rebuke. And I will take you to the theatre, and show you women whose work requires a constant physical training, an unblunted nervous sensibility, and a fastidious refinement and self-control which one week of ordinary plutocratic fat-feeding and self-indulgence would wreck, and who anxiously fulfil these requirements; and yet when you learn that they do not allow their personal relations to be regulated by your gratuitously unnatural and vicious English marriage laws, you will not hesitate to call them "immoral". The truth is that if the average British matron could be made half as delicate about her sexual relations, or half as abstemious in her habits as the average stage heroine, there would be an

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enormous improvement in our national manners and morals. When you sit in the stalls, think of this, and as the curtain rises and your eyes turn from the stifling grove of fat naked shoulders round you to the decent and refined lady on the stage, humble your bumptious spirit with a new sense of the extreme perversity and wickedness of that uncharitable Philistine bringing up of yours.

Hoping that your mission will end in your own speedy and happy conversion—I am, as ever, your patient Mentor,
G. Bernard Shaw.⁶

Poor Stead had neither the sophistication nor the humour to defend himself against such an onslaught. Neither had he any understanding of the “new morality”—especially sex morality—and his warm friendship with such “new women” as Annie Besant and Olive Schreiner remains something of a mystery.

Small wonder that Shaw found him “impossible as a colleague: he had to work single-handed because he was incapable of keeping faith when excited; and as his hyper-aesthesia was chronic he generally *was* excited”.⁷ This was borne out by John Morley, who successfully tempted Stead to come to London to edit the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1880. After three tempestuous years with Stead, Morley left the magazine and entered Parliament, eventually to become Irish Secretary. He accepted that challenge with the simple comment, “As I kept Stead in order for three years, I don’t see why I shouldn’t govern Ireland.”

Stead came down to London with reservations, for he looked on the metropolis with the suspicions of a Puritan reared in the traditions of Milton, Cromwell, and the Pilgrim Fathers. Furthermore, at thirty-one, he had already a successful record as editor of the *Northern Echo* at Darlington, and a family that he preferred not to raise in a city “steeped in cynicism and indifference”. Still, there was an element of the inevitable in the confrontation of this largely self-educated son of a Congregationalist minister and the city he was to characterize as “the modern Babylon”. Standing on the deck of the *Titanic*, at the sensational end to a sensational career, there was still some doubt as to whether he had changed London more than London had changed him.

We have already observed, in connection with his Spiritualism, that he was, at bottom, religiously conservative, though far from satisfied with the answers of orthodoxy or the behaviour of the Churches. He remained a seeker. His employer, Morley, was a professed Atheist, and wished to make the *Pall Mall Gazette* a declared advocate of Secularism. Stead, of course, could not do this. But in a later memoir of Morley he was able to say,

. . . I am by no means sure that he, the Atheist, is not much more deeply religious than I, the Christian. . . . There is a depth of reverence about him and a fine sympathy of soul to which I can lay no claim. . . . I, on the other hand, am so impatient, so vehement, so anxious ever to jog the elbow of the Almighty, that I fancy Mr. Morley's mood of mind harmonizes much more with the truly religious ideal, which is perhaps more devotional, more meditative, more resigned than mine could ever be. . . . I cannot be moderate, the throbbing of my heart will never cool, the fever burns within my brain.⁸

Neither in the *Gazette* nor in the *Review of Reviews*, which he founded in 1890, did he apologize for or conceal his religious motivations. It was a religion of feeling, not of thought—he rarely took time to think—and its continuing inconsistency never seemed to matter. Much of the time his religious utterances sounded like those of a revivalist preacher, but he yearned to be counted among the “advanced” thinkers too. In a New Year's summary for 1885 he wrote:

The formulas and shibboleths of a former age shrivel up or fall into pieces before the silent energies of present facts. Evolution is the greatest of all revolutions, for it is a constant factor in the progress of the race. Our creeds and our institutions perish or pass, not because we will but because they must. . . . The insignificance of the individual appears almost infinite.⁹

Churchmen were glad to have him on their side, but his support always raised questions. His association with diverse and suspect personalities was well known: the notorious if fascinating Annie Besant; the glamorous Russophile, Mme. Novikoff; the bohemian feminist, Olive Schreiner; the arch-imperialist

millionaire, Cecil Rhodes—not to speak of his reported contacts beyond the grave. The truth is that in a very real sense, editing was his religion and his heresy. He was a new kind of journalist in the 1880s and he made the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Review of Reviews* social and religious documents. The latter was the first of the “digests”, a compendium of articles from many sources, meant to make the finest contemporary journalism accessible to all English-speaking people. It began in January 1890. A special American edition was in charge of Albert Shaw.

Paradoxical in almost every respect (Lord Milner described him as a combination of Don Quixote and P. T. Barnum), he retained his pose of Champion of the Downtrodden throughout all his other roles. He neglected everything for his work—his social life, his family, even his manners (he called himself “the wild barbarian from the north”). This lifelong compulsive attachment to his mission was the real reason for the lack of culture which so disturbed GBS.

His journalistic ethics appalled many, but there can be no doubt about the effectiveness of his drive to better the conditions of the London poor. His part in publicizing *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*¹⁰ helped bring about Lord Salisbury’s action for the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Poor, which may be regarded as the beginning of modern social legislation. It incidentally catapulted the *Pall Mall Gazette* into public attention and high circulation figures.

All waves of Stead-inspired sensationalism, however, are reduced to mere ripples compared to the public indignation he stirred by his dramatic gesture against juvenile prostitution in 1885. Floundering in Parliament that year was a Criminal Law Amendment Bill, strongly supported by welfare workers but little regarded by the rest of the public. The welfare workers came to Stead for help. Stead was shocked to discover that any girl over thirteen was legally responsible for her own behaviour, and at the mercy of procurers. Many young girls, Stead was told, were inveigled into houses of prostitution, often hardly knowing what was in store for them.

“Aren’t their screams enough to raise hell?” Stead asked.

“They don’t even raise the neighbours,” a Scotland Yard investigator told him.

"Then I will raise hell!"

The plan that Stead concocted and carried out has little competition for melodrama in nineteenth-century fiction. He went first to London's three most eminent churchmen: the Archbishop of Canterbury (Edward White Benson), the Bishop of London (Frederick Temple, later himself Archbishop of Canterbury), and Cardinal Manning. The Archbishop demurred with some shock, but the others promised support.

Stead then asked the direct help of the Salvation Army's General Booth and his family. Through them he got in touch with Rebecca Jarrett, a procuress before she had joined the Army. Reluctant to return to her old ways even in a good cause, this woman nevertheless succeeded in obtaining from the child's mother thirteen-year-old Eliza Armstrong for the price of three pounds down and the promise of two pounds later; she then installed the girl in a brothel run by a Mme. Mourez. Posing as the patron who had financed this transaction, Stead presented himself at the brothel and was permitted to enter Eliza's room—where he found her asleep. When she awoke, startled, Stead called in a waiting Salvation Army woman officer who proceeded, as planned, to take charge of the girl. After a prominent London physician examined Eliza she was removed from the centre of the publicity that was to follow and placed in the care of the Salvation Army in Paris.

"Even at this date," Stead wrote in 1910, "I stand aghast at the audacity with which I carried the thing through." There is just a suggestion of self-delusion here. It was a task entirely cut to his own cloth, and there can be little doubt that both in creating the drama and in acting it out he enjoyed himself to the full.

In five flamboyant summer issues, the *Pall Mall Gazette* presented the great exposure to London and to the world under the banner of "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon". Stead's language was not calculated to spare Victorian prudery, and there were those who thought it almost better to let the evil persist than to talk so openly about it. In today's world of blatant tabloids we may even find a touch of nostalgia in such a comment as this from the *Weekly Times*: "The evil will be spread, till there will scarcely be a boy or girl in England whose

ignorance will not be displaced by forbidden knowledge, or whose innocence will not be tainted." But expressions of support far outweighed such timidities. England rose to its duty, even while deploring Stead's vulgarity. The Criminal Law Amendment Bill passed through both Houses of Parliament in almost record time.

For all the to-do, its reforms seem less than radical: it raised the "age of consent" to sixteen, allowed girls of any age to testify against procurers and increased penalties for both domestic and "white slavery" traffic in prostitution. On the other hand a dark corner of London underworld which reformers had sought for decades to bring before the public conscience was suddenly flooded with light.

But the Eliza story was to yield even more publicity than Stead had planned. With a sudden return of maternal sentiment Eliza's mother decided she wanted her daughter back, and it was learned that Rebecca Jarrett had failed to obtain a legal essential—the *father's* consent. Stead and his "accomplices" were hauled into Bow Street and later to the Old Bailey as abductors. The trial was protracted, sensational, and studded with celebrated names from the clergy and from Parliament. In the end only the Salvation Army people were acquitted. Stead was sentenced to three months in prison, with leniency recommended.

As anyone who knew William Stead might surmise, he made the most of the entire business. Actually he spent only three uncomfortable days in Coldbath Prison; from there he was removed to Holloway Jail, where quite obviously he was accorded special treatment. "Never had I a pleasanter holiday, a more charming season of repose," he reported. He was allowed to edit the *Gazette* from his jail cell. His New Year's greeting card for January 1886 shows a picture of Holloway Jail on the left, his own bearded visage at the right and the inscription beneath: "God, even my God, hath anointed me with the oil of gladness above my fellows." Immediately upon release he had ready the manuscript for a threepenny pamphlet, "My First Imprisonment".

Stead emerged to throw himself into "the New Crusade" for reforming London, his journalism once more taking the tone of the revival hall:

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This work cannot be done by subscribers. Christ did not bribe a superfluous angel by liberal subscriptions in order to be crucified by deputy. . . . If there is not enough God in all our churches to furnish forth sufficient Christlike men and women to do this thing, what do we mean by calling ourselves Christians? . . . The idea that God can and will guide you and me as much as He guided any of the ancient notables whose lives got written about in the Bible is to many absurd. But it seems to me that God has as much work needing to be done here as in the Wilderness of Sin, and that there is as much need for God-inspired people in this nursery of nations as there was down in Judea.¹¹

Many Londoners who were happy enough to see the Criminal Law Amendment Act passed were none the less repelled by Stead's tawdry performance and self-advertisement. Furthermore the exposures made by Stead in the series of articles were utilized abroad in sensational ways purporting to give a picture of London society. In Paris *La Société de Londres* appeared in which the immorality and hypocrisy of the English were held up to derision. Swinburne reacted with some scurrilous verses, printed for private circulation only. One was called "The Marquis of Stead", suggesting a connection with the Marquis de Sade. In another, a roundel, the poet indulged his venom for both Stead and his Salvation Army accomplices:

To Booth and Stead in rhymes uncouth
Be homage given, and praise be said
By maid and boy, old age and youth,
To Booth and Stead.

The gorge may rise, the cheek wax red,
To hear or read them, what forsooth,
Concerns it then, if heard and read?

If foul be fair and falsehood truth
Praise be to creatures born and bred
In cesspools—praise to Stead and Booth,
To Booth and Stead.¹²

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Stead would have none of Socialism, so he could hardly have expected much support from H. M. Hyndman. The old Socialist was himself a crochety reporter whose judgments were unstable, yet he had some grudging admiration for Stead's effectiveness. He noted with accuracy that Stead liked grandiose concepts—the railway from Cairo to the Cape, the British flag over all Africa, the awakening of British universities. He remarked, too, that this Champion of the Poor (though not personally covetous) stood in great awe of Fame and Money.¹³ Stead praised the Czar (whom he had personally interviewed) the Kaiser, the Pope, and was particularly fascinated by the diamond-mine millionaire, Cecil Rhodes. Unlike most of the reform-minded leaders with whom we have been dealing, Stead was a frank Imperialist.

At present we are *in loco parentis* to millions of men of alien race, religion, language, and laws. No sane politician would seriously propose to leave these nations to their own governing any more than anyone would propose to the father of a large family to turn all his children into the streets.¹⁴

This paternalism was in perfect accord with that of Rhodes, who believed that Anglo-Saxon civilization was the highest yet attained, and strove for the Anglicanization of the world, beginning in Africa. Both Stead and Rhodes believed the subject peoples should be trained for eventual self-government. Rhodes probably financed some of Stead's projects, but was too busy in Africa to give much time to London affairs. They later parted ways on the issues of the Boer War.

It was inevitable that Stead should carry his special brand of social reform and religious uplift to America. He was particularly challenged by Chicago, which he saw as the potential capital of the New World. He could not resist its corruption, poverty, crudity, and sheer size. On his first visit in October 1893 he called mass meetings, and special meetings of Christian pastors. He dressed as a working man and spent time with saloon keepers. He spoke somewhat shockingly to society ladies and temperance groups. He told a mass meeting:

We must judge applied Christianity not by splendid ceremonies but by the extent to which it has been able to remake

fallen men and women. . . . If Christ had come to Chicago this morning He might have said: "Well, in the Old World . . . a world grown grey in misery before I was born, there might be some reason for my failure, but here, in a New World . . . with no curse of crooked alley or soil soaked with sewage, with no kings or aristocracy, here I might expect that my work had achieved some measure of success."¹⁵

Out of this grew the 500-page paperback book, *If Christ Came to Chicago*, selling for fifty cents.

Stead's final reputation was that of a peacemaker (one cannot quite say *pacifist*), particularly as regards the South African War. Against this one must balance his former Imperialism and his propaganda for a larger navy. Earlier, too, in 1885, he helped build pressure to send General Charles George Gordon into the Sudan to take Khartoum and abolish the slave trade. Gordon was cut off and slain before relief could arrive, and Britain withdrew from the Sudan. The argument was never resolved as to whether Gordon should have been more adequately supported, or whether the expedition was foolhardy in the first place.

Though it was certainly a mistake to rely on Stead as a military strategist, one must say in all justice that his dream was always for a United States of Europe, with an International Court of Justice, and an international police force to carry out its decisions. All other proposals were meant to be expedients, not panaceas.

Ever since the Boers had revolted and invaded the Natal in the early eighties, the arrangement effected by Gladstone remained shaky and unsatisfactory. Cecil Rhodes, as Prime Minister of the Cape, aimed at the extension of British power throughout South Africa. He was implicated in "the Jameson Raid" of 1895—an unauthorized and unsuccessful attempt to take over the Transvaal from the Boers. Some of the raiders were tried and sentenced in England. Rhodes never was, but he was forced to resign as Prime Minister. The Boers under President Krüger thereafter eased the British out of authority and made plain their intent to limit British economic participation as well. They had secretly been preparing for war for nearly a decade and were more formidable than Britain imagined.

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As war fever rose Stead tried to rally the dwindling opposition. He failed to gain an audience with Pope Leo XIII, but raced about Europe seeing heads of states. He interviewed Czar Nicholas II (as he had his father) and supported his Rescript of August 1898 as a plan for international peace. At the Hague Conference of 1899 he acted as the Czar's "special correspondent". (On the death of the Czar's brother, Stead thoughtfully sent the monarch a copy of *Letters from Julia*.)

Back in London Stead helped organize the big rally at St. James's Hall on 10 December 1898—this had Shaw's cautious support. The actual outbreak of war in South Africa in October 1899 shattered any hope the Hague Conference may have built up. Stead immediately put together a "Stop the War Committee" headed and largely financed by himself. Indeed he so gave himself to the cause of peace that his associates on the *Review of Reviews* secretly banked some of the proceeds of the magazine in a separate account for the benefit of the Stead household. His Committee had small support in Parliament, but it included Lloyd George, Henry Labouchere, and Keir Hardie. The Committee sponsored scores of public meetings, arousing much agitation and some violence. Out of it grew The International Union—an attempt to round up under a single banner all other peace groups including the peace-wings of the various Socialist groups and the ILP, and "such remnant of the Christians as have not apostatized from the faith of their Founder".¹⁶

As an editor, however, Stead's chief weapon was still the Press. He brought out his most blatant piece of propaganda, a weekly sixteen-page paper selling for a penny: *War Against War in South Africa*. Every issue was mastheaded with the cartoon of a grasping John Bull laying enormous hands on the portion of the globe marked *Africa*. Each issue carried the same bold-faced "Programme" down the left-hand column:

1. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?

Stop the war!

2. WHEN?

Immediately!

3. WHY?

Because we are in the wrong.

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4. HOW?

By confessing our sins and doing right.

5. WHAT SINS?

Lying to cover conspiracy.

Fraud in Making False Claims.

Bad faith in going back on our word.

Wholesale Murder.

6. AND TO DO RIGHT?

Expose and punish the criminals.

Compensate their victims.

And make peace!

Under the masthead: "Deliver us from Bloodguiltiness, O Lord!" Much of the paper was made up of reprints from other sources. There were cartoons on almost every page. Each week there was a campaign summary. Each week there was a black-bordered list of killed and wounded—British and Boers—labelled "Mr. Chamberlain's Butcher's Bill", and addressed "To the Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain, M.P., Dr. . . . For Carnage Incurred in His War in Africa". The list grew to a full page. In the fourth issue there was a Memorial to the Queen asking an end to the War and leaving space for signatures. Dr. Parker of the City Temple made his own plea addressed to the Queen. And there were sentimental anti-war poems ("Somebody's darling, so young, so fair . . .").

At the height of the War Stead finally turned his wrath against the clergy:

Hell is let loose in South Africa and millions of moral, religious and Christian Englishmen are warming their hands at the flames—really believing that they are fulfilling the law of love and promoting the establishment of the Kingdom of the Prince of Peace. . . . These ministers of Christ exult in combining Christ and carnage. They say their prayers and sing their hymns and imagine that this is religion!¹⁷

More than half a century later, the reader of the florid phrases must remind himself that Stead, in addition to his other pursuits during these busy days, sometimes turned out as much as twelve thousand words of copy in a day. The tone was shrill, but

it was almost the only printed word totally against government policy. There was one exception. The Quaker cocoa magnate, George Cadbury, who, at the suggestion of Lloyd George, had bought the *Daily News* at the outbreak of the War, maintained a more sober opposition.

Stead's *War Against War* lasted only to 1900. The War itself, in which both sides had looked for an easy victory, plodded on. South Africa was slowly occupied by connecting block houses with thousands of miles of barbed-wire entanglement. On 1 June 1902 the Transvaal and the Orange Free State were incorporated as part of the Empire. It had required three years and 220 million pounds for Britain to subdue a population of 50,000 adult males.

Stead's support of the Boers was, at least, unequivocal. Even Hyndman gave him credit on this score, and said that had he lived the Nobel Trustees had decided to give him the Peace Prize, though I do not know what the source of Hyndman's information was.¹⁸ Stead always acted with the assurance that he was in the right, and had none of Hamlet's problems of decision. John Burns, M.P., fiery leader of the dockworkers in 1889, complimented Stead on his paper's policy, and declared he was ashamed of being a Briton, but sternly called Stead to account for helping to produce the war climate:

. . . the tragedy of it all is that you and Rhodes are the real authors of this bad business. Your "big navy", your "Anglo-Saxon imperialism", your "Federation of the British People" all these shibboleths, cries, and catchwords have been exploited by the thieving murderous crew of mine owners and peers who dominate Africa and run this cabinet.¹⁹

In 1914 Burns took a pacifist stand and left the government.

Beatrice Webb, sadly looking back on the South African carnage, also noted an omission—though she did not communicate it to Stead. Amid all the angry argument as to whether the territories of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State should be governed by the resident farmers (Boers) or by the legislative assemblies at Capetown and Westminster, no one in Britain or in South Africa seemed to have given thought to the five or six million native Kaffirs among whom all the whites were a minority

and intruders. People were "pro-Boer" or "Imperialist". Who was "pro-Kaffir?"²⁰

Apparently such delicate questions of conscience were not of the sort that disturbed Stead. Characteristically at the end of the War he turned his full interest to other matters, including a concern for the oppressed masses of India. But peace and world government could always claim a share of his time. He kept hoping that Carnegie, or some other millionaire, would endow some peace-keeping machinery, beginning with the International Court of Justice at the Hague. And with no sense of chastened pride he wrote to F. W. Holls in New York in 1902, "I was thinking of going to Russia this week, and if I do I will certainly take the opportunity with Mr. Martens and the Emperor to make your suggestion as to the neutralization of Holland."²¹

More of his time went directly to religion and Spiritualism. He went to verify for himself the stories of the Welsh Revival in 1904. Greatly impressed, he published a pamphlet on it which achieved a distribution of 700,000—largely in America. He would himself like to have been a great preacher capable of rousing audiences to religious fervour. The accounts are, however, that he was a competent public speaker but had not the special gift of swaying great audiences. With the help of his daughter, Estelle, he tried to carry something of the Welsh Revival spirit to the National Free Church Council in March 1905—he speaking while she prayed. But "the tongues of fire were held back."²² The death of his son, Willie, in 1908 moved him farther towards the area of direct religious experience.

The cablegram from New York on 17 March 1912 read:

Will you come New York and address the Great Men and Religions Congress in Carnegie Hall April 22nd with President Taft? We pay expenses. Subject world peace. Please cable.²³

Among the other speakers were to be the British Ambassador, William Jennings Bryan, and Booker T. Washington.

He sailed on the *Titanic*. From survivors' testimony he remained calm, left scarce lifebelts to others, and was last seen in an attitude of prayerful meditation. Even in the hours of suspense following the news of the disaster, his daughter, Pearl,

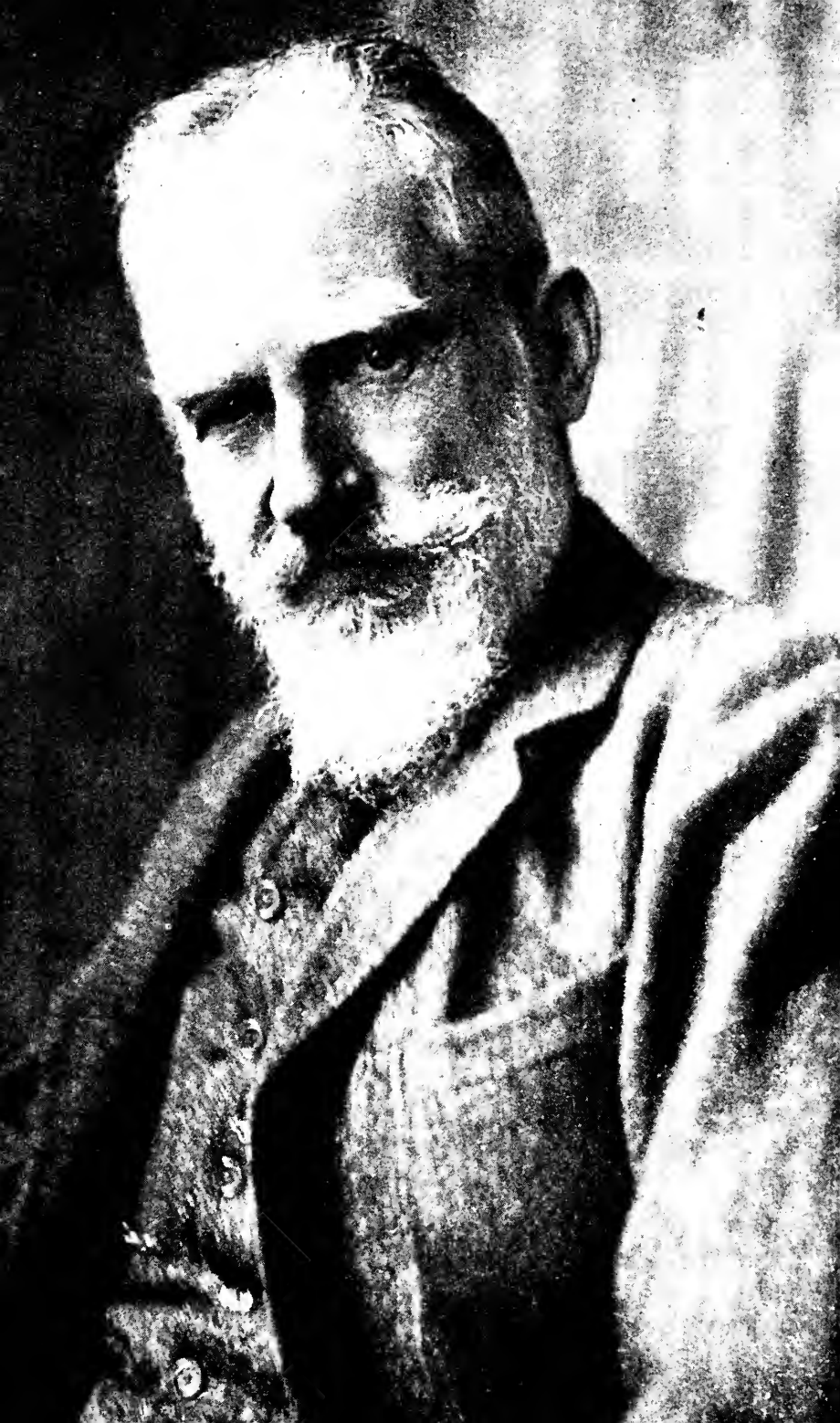
reasoned that she would never see her father again "because he would never have left the ship while a woman or child remained behind". She thought, too, that it was the death he would have chosen, in the midst of his work. "I could never imagine Father old and losing his power."²⁴ It is unlikely that any of his contemporaries could imagine W. T. Stead without his crusading vigour.

There is much more to be said about Bernard Shaw, but less need for saying it. As Shaw wrote in the third person, pretending to be Frank Harris, "Shaw is almost a hopeless subject, because there is nothing interesting to be said about him that he has not already said about himself."²⁵ If this were true when he wrote it in 1919, it has been verified a thousand times posthumously. The mountain of correspondence, speeches, and critical writings from his own pen grows higher every year, and sixteen years after his death the end is not yet in sight. For a man who refused to write his own autobiography on the grounds that all written reminiscences are conscious lies, he made abundantly sure that others who were to tackle the job should have sufficient first-hand material. Even more than Stead it has been impossible to keep Shaw out of the preceding pages.

The years which loosely set the boundaries of this study are those in which the diffident young Dubliner, George B. Shaw, went through the crucible of London art galleries, music halls, lecture halls, editorial rooms, libraries, committee rooms, outdoor meetings, and ladies' boudoirs to emerge as the delicately adjusted schizophrenic prophet-jokester. Bernard Shaw—GBS. The many stormy gatherings we have been describing were the practicum of his belated education. They were, for the most part, his night school. He spent most of his days in the reading room of the British Museum. A more effective curriculum can hardly be imagined.

The proliferation of secular-religious heretical societies were made to order for him for two reasons. First, he needed desperately forums in which to develop his skills as a speaker and a committee man. Second, he needed to resolve his own deeply motivated concerns about religion and society. In 1909, in what





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is still the best all-round critical work on Shaw, G. K. Chesterton made an illuminating observation about him as a prophet: the more ancient variety, Jesus or Socrates, for example, knew what they wanted to say before they said it. For Shaw the act of communication *was* the thought-process itself. Shaw could store up information from the British Museum, store up images from galleries and concerts and the view from Dalkey Hill. Before he could make them into a proper pattern for himself, he needed, so to speak, to "try them on", to rub them against other people, to stimulate and to respond, to discard and retain.

When he first came to London at the age of twenty in 1876 to join his mother and his surviving sister, Lucy, he spent a good deal of his time writing novels. He wrote five of them in seven years with hardly any success at all. In the meantime he began to search out the lecture halls, and the story of his finding Henry George and Sidney Webb, and finally the Fabians, is so well known it will hardly need attention here. The truth is he joined all sorts of societies. In addition to the Dialectical and the Zetetical, which we noted earlier, he was taken with the literary societies of F. J. Furnivall: the New Shakespeare Society, the Browning Society, the Shelley Society. He mentions also the Bedford Debating Society of Stopford Brooke at Bedford Chapel. It was at the Nonconformist Memorial Hall in Farringdon Street that he first heard Henry George, in 1884.²⁶

Shaw became a joiner, but he was careful not to align himself with any organization that committed him to a religious or political point of view to which he could not wholeheartedly subscribe. It was in the end only the Fabian Society that earned his devotion over the years. But he asked questions or made replies wherever he went, and was inevitably called upon to serve on committees. Shaw actually enjoyed committee work, and learned a great deal about human nature in the process. He also learned how to get his own way. Often he sat through stormy sessions, patiently waiting for the proper moment to submit the plan he had devised long in advance. Shaw said, only half facetiously, that the only people who saw much of him were those who served on committees with him.²⁷

A surprising number of the names dealt with in this book, minor characters as well as major, are of people who appeared

on the platform with Shaw or who served on committees with him. It is unlikely that anyone in London had at least passing acquaintance with so many different shades of heretics. Shaw took it for granted that the various circles which he inhabited did not themselves intersect. "As my friends lived in different worlds and I rarely introduced one to the other they did not necessarily know one another."²⁸

Once at the Hall of Science, when he was still a novice, Shaw, sitting far back in the Hall, rose to make a comment after a Bradlaugh lecture. He had hardly uttered two sentences, when Bradlaugh rose and said, "The gentleman is a speaker. Come to the platform." Shaw reports that he did so and that Bradlaugh devoted considerable time to a reply. But he never formally debated with Bradlaugh. He was once scheduled to do so on behalf of Morris's Socialist League on the subject, "Will Socialism benefit the English People?" Bradlaugh insisted that Socialism be defined in Hyndman's terms, and as Hyndman was strongly anti-Fabian, Shaw refused. The debate was called off—Shaw admits to his relief at the time, though later he regretted the lost opportunity. History regrets it too. "It pleased me to imagine," Shaw mused, "that he refused a set debate with me much as Edmund Kean refused to act with Macready." But this was wishful thinking. Bradlaugh, in those days, was taking on all comers.²⁹ Shaw did debate with Foote after Bradlaugh's death. "We went at it hammer-and-tongs for two nights. Oratorically honours were even; but I was more at home in economics than Foote, and should, I believe, have won the verdict had a vote been taken."

The time came when his life became too full for constant public speaking. He had not time to prepare new presentations and was afraid of becoming "a windbag with only one speech". About 1895 he began to limit his public appearances to special occasions. The special occasions included not only Socialist gatherings, but instances where he was specifically requested to speak on religious themes. Besides his appearances at the City Temple and before the Guild of Saint Matthew, he delivered religious speeches at Kensington Town Hall, the New Reform Club, Cambridge University, and elsewhere before World War I, and thereafter less frequently until the end of his life.³⁰

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At seventy-seven he made his single public appearance in America, giving a long political lecture to a crowded audience in the Metropolitan Opera House. He confessed that he had to rest for two days afterwards. More and more he made use of radio broadcasting.

Shaw was unique among the London heretics in that he had developed his own substitute religion, really his own theology. Although his reputation steadily grew as the great idol-smasher, he made it a point always to have replacements for the broken crockery. Too often, with the help of the GBS-jokester, the smashing ceremony was such fun, and provided such welcome release, that no one really investigated the worth of the new article. As recently as 1960, to mark the tenth anniversary of Shaw's death, the *New York Times Magazine* presented a page of Shavian paradoxes completely out of context, simply as jokes, with no overtones of the prophetic voice. Eric Bentley, in 1947, was among the first to point out in so many words that the comic puppet which Shaw so skilfully constructed to win him an audience, turned on the old sage and almost overcame him.³¹ In vain Peter Keegan (in *John Bull's Other Island*) cried out, "Every dream is a prophecy: every jest is an earnest in the womb of Time."

There was for Shaw none of the early suffering that so many of his contemporaries experienced in breaking from the old faith. He was born and baptized in the Established Church of Ireland (like Tyrrell), but his mother, he tells us, had been brought up so strictly that, in reaction, churchgoing was dropped in his family before he was ten years old. He considered himself a sceptic from early childhood. He did feel, for a time, disposed to say prayers.

I cannot recall the final form I adopted; but I remember that it was in three movements, like a sonata, and in the best Church of Ireland style. It ended with the Lord's prayer; and I repeated it every night in bed. I had been warned by my nurse that warm prayers were no use, and that only by kneeling by my bedside in the cold could I hope for a hearing; but I criticized this admonition unfavourably on various grounds, the real one being my preference for warmth and comfort. I

did not disparage my nurse's authority in these matters because she was a Roman Catholic: I even tolerated her practice of sprinkling me with holy water occasionally. But her asceticism did not fit the essentially artistic and luxurious character of my devotional exploits. Besides, the penalty did not apply to my prayer; for it was not a petition. I had too much sense to risk my faith by begging for things I knew very well I should not get; so I did not care whether my prayers were answered or not: they were a literary performance for the entertainment and propitiation of the Almighty; and though I should not have dreamt of daring to say that if He did not like them He might lump them (perhaps I was too confident of their quality to apprehend such a rebuff), I certainly behaved as if my comfort were an indispensable condition of the performance taking place at all.³²

He was never confirmed. He does not think his parents were either. Irish Protestantism was for him not a religion at all, but a social convention. His few exposures to it were not for the sake of his own salvation, but for his father's respectability. When they went to live at Torca Cottage on Dalkey Hill in 1866, all religious practice was discontinued.

Imagine being taught that there is one God, a Protestant and perfect gentleman, keeping Heaven select for the gentry against an idolatrous imposter called the Pope! Imagine the pretensions of the English peerage on the incomes of the English middle class! I remember Stopford Brooke one day telling me that he discerned in my books an intense and contemptuous hatred for society. No wonder!³³

His revolt against the Church was of a piece with his revolt against society. When he was too young to be allowed out by himself, a nurse was dispatched to take him for a walk in some nicer neighbourhood. Instead, the servant would meet a male acquaintance and the three of them would go into a public house bar where he was treated with lemonade or ginger beer. But young Shaw knew that his own father's life had been made miserable by drink, and looked upon the public house as a wicked place.

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Thus were laid the foundations of my lifelong hatred of poverty, and the devotion of all my public life to the task of exterminating the poor and rendering their resurrection for ever impossible.³⁴

Shaw's humour never concealed the bitterness he felt about his early years. He would have been more decently brought up, he maintains, if his parents had been too poor to afford servants.³⁵

It is not surprising, then, to find the adult Shaw in London proclaiming himself an Atheist. But, as he later pointed out, there are several kinds of Atheism. "There is the youthful Atheism with which every able modern mind begins: an Atheism that clears the soul of superstitions and terrors and servilities and base compliances and hypocrisies, and lets in the light of heaven. And then there is the Atheism of despair and pessimism."³⁶ It was the former kind Shaw subscribed to when he shocked some of the ladies of the Shelley Society by proclaiming that he was, like Shelley, a Socialist, an Atheist, and a Vegetarian. Besides, this was in the days when the opposition to Bradlaugh and Foote had achieved such proportions that Shaw preferred to be counted among their supporters rather than their attackers. "I preferred to call myself an Atheist because belief in God then meant belief in the old tribal idol called Jehovah; and I would not, by calling myself an Agnostic, pretend that I did not know whether it existed or not."³⁷

But Socialism alone was not enough. It was precisely H. M. Hyndman's limitation that he never went beyond Marx and internationalism. "He never went on from the industrial revolution to the next things—to the revolution in morals, and to the formulation and establishment of a credible and effective indigenous Western religion."³⁸ Shaw found Bradlaugh's survivors in the National Secular Society to be, in this regard, "Free-thought Fundamentalists", unable to accept even the poetic imagery of mysticism. Their position remained essentially one of denial, Shaw felt; and although this position had been forced upon Bradlaugh by the nature of his pioneering campaigns against the Establishment, the time had come for affirmation.

Since there was no affirmative religion in the Western world in which a reasonably intelligent man could believe, Shaw

proceeded to devise one for himself. He enjoyed using old words in fresh ways, and one can find him calling himself a Catholic at one point and a Protestant at another. He used the word "Catholic" to mean "universal" (it meant the same as "communist", he said). When he called himself Protestant, he thought of himself as a Separatist from the Establishment. "Now of separation there is no end until every human being is a Separate Church, for which there is much to be said."³⁹ His aim, therefore, was a belief that could be at the same time individual and universal. Scattered statements of this sort have led the unwary to suppose that Shaw's religious beliefs kept fluctuating in order to produce the best paradox at any given moment. Instead his religion, as it matured, formed a steadying and consistent strain in one of the most complex minds of the twentieth century. That complexity involved such unexplored wells of despair and such extremes of what is presently called "existential pain", that even now the Shavian playgoer, still watched over and protected by the GBS-jokester, has never had more than a glimpse within. But that is a matter for another time.

It goes without saying that any religion devised by Shaw would have to complement his Socialism. It would have to be, therefore, concerned with justice and the social order and the improvement of life on this planet. Yet a purely Pragmatist approach did not appeal to him. Pragmatism tended to maintain that whatever works is good, and he perceived that many systems which produced some good results were inherently evil. Napoleon, for instance, brought many beneficent changes to Europe, yet it would have been better for the world if he had never been born. Shaw preferred a mystical revelation to a Rationalist one. He says he abandoned Rationalism after his second novel—which would have been in 1880.

Neither could he accept the whole cult of Science, nor the Scientist as the new priest. He was forced to accept the fact of evolution, but he rebelled, with Samuel Butler, against the idea of "the survival of the fittest", if by that was meant a cosmos governed by mere accident. He preferred the earlier evolutionary theory of the Chevalier de Lamarck, which permitted the presence of mind or will in the evolutionary process. Whereas Darwinians might assume that the giraffe had a long neck because,

in an area where the only available food was ever higher in the trees, only those lucky enough to have a "neck-advantage" could survive and breed, Shaw and Butler would have argued that only those animals with sufficient *will* to stretch their necks a little farther would survive. The results in both instances would be the same, but the conception of the nature of life wholly different.

What, then, was the source of this will that ran through all living things? Shaw preferred the term and the conception of Henri Bergson—the *Élan Vital*, the Life Force. He sometimes called it the Evolutionary Appetite. He did not like to call it God, though occasionally, for City Temple audiences, he did so with careful stipulations. It was more proper, perhaps, to call it the Holy Spirit ("the only surviving member of the Trinity"). Near the end of his life he consented to refer to it as Divine Providence.

The familiar terminology may be initially disarming, but his readers and listeners soon discovered (and in some cases were all the more shocked) to find that the Life Force, by whatever name, had few of the attributes usually associated with Godhead. It had no "personality". It was not omnipotent. It was not necessarily beneficent. But it was persistent. It had a direction. It was moving towards Godhead and would continue so to move indefinitely. At first this may seem to have been a kind of unjustifiable optimism on Shaw's part, but if so it was optimism only on a cosmic plane. For there was no guarantee that the human race as we know it, or even that this planet as we know it, would succeed in being a proper instrument of the Life Force. Indeed as Shaw grew older, there seemed to be more and more evidence that we would be "scrapped". When Lawrence Langner of the Theatre Guild brought Shaw greetings from Eugene O'Neill (whom he had never met), Shaw politely inquired about O'Neill's health and state of mind. Langner reported that O'Neill was pessimistic about the state of the world and was of the opinion that our present civilization was on its way downhill and headed for ultimate disaster.

"Tell him not to worry about that," said Shaw cheerily. "If mankind turns out, as I suspect, to be a failure, it will destroy itself and be replaced by some other creature."⁴⁰

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Shaw's oft-vaunted optimism turns out to be, on closer examination, a combination of good health, cheerfulness, and a remarkable kind of detachment. Furthermore he was constitutionally opposed to cynicism. He could see no point in continually addressing a dying civilization. Unlike a later Irish expatriate, Samuel Beckett, he made the assumption that there were those in his audiences and among his readers who could be stirred to action by his message and might rescue our tottering civilization from the abyss. "We live," he said in one of those remarkably Shavian images, "as in a villa on Vesuvius."⁴¹

Hence the tone of the schoolmaster and the preacher. We must set our house in order, eliminate poverty, and learn government, so we may have at least an off-chance for survival. But this is rudimentary. Our real aim must be to become more sentient beings, longer lived, and more abundantly alive, so that we can carry out the will of the Life Force. The Life Force has no hands or mind of its own. When he spoke of these matters in public, the familiar GBS-jokester vanished, and audiences described as "consternated" or even "terrified", heard him say.

If you don't do his work it won't be done; if you turn away from it, if you sit down and say, "Thy will be done," you might as well be the most irreligious person on the face of the earth. But if you will stand by your God, if you will say, "My business is to do your will, my hands are your hands, my tongue is your tongue, my brain is your brain, I am here to do thy work, and I will do it," you will get rid of otherworldiness, you will get rid of all that religion which is made an excuse and a cloak for doing nothing, and you will learn not only to worship your God, but also to have a fellow feeling with him.⁴²

After that, it is not too difficult to accept his repeated claim to affinity with the Society of Friends. "If I had to be fitted into any religious denomination, the Society of Friends . . . would have the best chance," he once explained to newspaper questioning.⁴³ But he goes on to say at once that in the face of his very explicit writings on the subject there is no excuse for regarding him as a member of any Church or sect "unless the believers in Creative

Evolution can be described as a sect". I know of no instance where Shaw ever attended a Quaker Meeting for worship or in any way identified himself with the Society of Friends as an organization. He was attracted to their method of silent worship, their dependence on "the inner light" (a phrase he occasionally borrowed), and their courageous pacifism at the time of World War I. In later years he became particularly interested in the life of the Quaker founder, George Fox, and included him in the cast of characters of *In Good King Charles's Golden Days*.

The essay, "What Is My Religious Faith?" in *Sixteen Self Sketches* is capsule size. His most complete exposition is the sixty-page preface to *Back to Methuselah*. But the theme is unmistakable in all his works, especially from *Man and Superman* (1903) onwards. His most perceptive critics—Chesterton, J. S. Collis, C. E. M. Joad, Eric Bentley—have dealt seriously with his religion. And it is encouraging to note that a younger commentator, Anthony S. Abbott, has just published a study of *Shaw and Christianity*.⁴⁴

Bernard Shaw, like his old friend, Annie Besant, was destined to live many "lives"—author, journalist, orator, politician, committee man, man of the world, and so forth—as he himself has enumerated them. They were held together, more securely than Annie's, by his twin beliefs in Socialism and the Life Force. First one, then the other, grew from the spiritual turmoil of the London into which he consciously threw himself during his first decade there. Both served to sustain him through the longest and most productive of the many careers that emerged from that same crucible.

Only Shaw emerged on the other side of World War I a larger figure than he had been before it. And Shaw was a man, not a movement. After 1919 the heretical movements are hard to find. It is tempting to conclude that they were swept away by the War, but a careful backward look will show that this was not so. By the turn of the century the Secularists had already dwindled and divided. The Rationalist Press Association survived, but as a pioneer book club, not as an active Freethinking society. The Positivists had virtually disappeared. South Place as an institution

did not flourish after Moncure Conway's passing, though it continued (as it still does in Red Lion Square) as a centre for ethical culture and adult education. The Ethical Movement itself, as we have noted, retained some vigour. Theosophy persisted in small divided cults. Roman Catholic Modernism was forcibly crushed. The surge in social consciousness within the Anglican Church, as led by Stewart Headlam, expanded into a wider concern at a much lower level. Except for the promising international gatherings led by the Unitarians, only the great revival at the City Temple can be said to have actually collapsed into the War itself, and this was largely a one-man movement that lost its leader. Clearly the London heresies were on the wane before World War I.

Did they perish of their own success, as A. O. J. Cockshut believes was the case with the Secularists? Successful reform legislation and the revival of trade may have removed the sense of urgency from the social platforms of these organizations, though certainly poverty and slum living had not disappeared and had hardly abated. Beatrice Webb noted as one of the most striking social changes in her lifetime the passing of personal almsgiving. Incessant Socialist propaganda, along with the steady rise of the Labour Party, substituted in the public mind the ideal of equity for the nineteenth-century notion of philanthropy.⁴⁵

It would be a mistake to think that Orthodoxy had gone out of style with almsgiving. Still, the heretical societies may have in some measure done their work. Beyond the restrictive action of Pius X, it was not likely after 1907 that there would be further arrests for heresy or blasphemy. One Atheist had proved that he could sit in Parliament; the next, if there was one, had merely to rely on the Affirmation Act. Within the Church, too, the atmosphere had changed. The revolution Stewart Headlam would have advocated was no nearer than ever—it was, in fact, probably farther off, for "Broad Churchmen" had brought in the semblance of scholarship and social concern, and the pressures for revolutionary change were thereby abated. A measure of the change within a single generation is the elevation to Archbishop of Canterbury in 1896 of one of the scandalous "Seven Against Christ" who wrote *Essays and Reviews* in 1860—Frederick

Temple. Surely many a pewholder whose private and secret views in 1870 might have led him to wonder uneasily if he might not more honestly belong at the Church of Humanity, or South Place, or the Hall of Science, could feel much more at ease in 1910 safely within the Establishment with Bishop Gore or Dean Inge; or, if not there, then at least within the relatively respectable Nonconformist populace at The City Temple.

The mere cessation of active persecution, however, and the growing liberalism within the Churches cannot adequately explain the loss of vigour of the heretical movements. Nor is it enough to point to the passing of the powerful leaders—Conway, Bradlaugh, Besant, and Campbell. There were still leaders to rally around. Headlam lived on, as did Frederic Harrison, John MacKinnon Robertson, and Percy Dearmer—all competent and faithful advocates of their causes. And there were doubtless others waiting in the wings. The rallying spirit itself had died. And its demise was not accompanied by a corresponding resurgence within old-fashioned Orthodoxy.

The driving power behind the London heresies was a new kind of idealism. Partially it derived from "the naïve belief of the most original and vigorous minds of the seventies and eighties that it was by Science, and by Science alone, that all human misery would be ultimately swept away."⁴⁶ But there was also the belief, perhaps not so naïve as Mrs. Webb thought, that they had come to a great watershed in the history of civilization. They were privileged, sitting as they were in the very centre of the British Empire, to watch the collapse of old outworn institutions, and to help lay the foundations for the new. It would be pathetic to think that they were wholly wrong. It is tragic to think that they were very nearly right.

Historian Ensor felt that there was a "mood of sunrise" in the first decade of the twentieth century. Kipling's imperialism had been deflated by the Boer War; the *Yellow Book's* decadence had been discredited by the notorious Oscar Wilde case. "The way seemed open for new impulses of courage and idealism."⁴⁷ But C. F. G. Masterman, assaying *The Condition of England* in 1909, wrote a jeremiad to a declining civilization. Sounding remarkably familiar to our contemporary ears, he declared that "modern civilization in its most highly organized forms has

elaborated a system to which the delicate fibre of body and mind is unable to respond. . . . The more comfortable and opulent society becomes, the more cynicism proclaims the futility of it all, and the mind turns in despair from a vision of vanities." He finds the steam gone out of the reform movements. The great multitudes spurn the Hall of Science as they spurn the Church—they want merely to be left alone. The suburban middle class has neither true culture nor pride in its work. Power flows into the hands of the dominant "Conquerors" of both England and America. He views the pathetic little crowd gathered round the pillars of the National Gallery with banners demanding the speedy coming of the Social Revolution, and finds them "mocked alike by the solid architecture, the indulgent policeman, the indifferent multitude that passes by".⁴⁸

The heresies collapsed because, in the wave of disenchantment, the idealism collapsed. So much has been written of the demoralizing effects of World War I that we may have failed to assess correctly the earlier disenchantment of the Boer War. One of the hallmarks of the New Era was to be peace and international co-operation. If war were to be justified at all, it would have to be in support of a revolution against old oligarchies. The Boer War could make no such pretensions. Nearly all members of heretical groups were opposed to it, yet they were powerless to prevent it and, once shooting began, powerless to bring it to a close. The more they learned, bit by bit, of the nature of the fighting in South Africa, the deeper was their disillusion. Britain's victory was costly and inglorious. British sense of guilt must have been in many quarters much like the American liberals' heartsickness over the slaughter in Vietnam. With British soldiers imposing an unwanted régime on brave and independent farmers far away, how could zealous Londoners continue to think of building "Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land"? And how could they be sure that mankind was not, after all, essentially depraved? For all that they had abandoned his theological reasoning, might not John Calvin have been closer to the true nature of man than Frederick Denison Maurice?

I am aware that such attitudes were not formed by conscious rationale. Yet the spiritual depression of the Left, if it was in

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response to any external circumstances, was in response to turn-of-the-century events, rather than to World War I. For these particular Londoners the years after 1914 may have been morally anticlimactic, even though the Great War was more overwhelming in its devastation.

What survived of the London heresies after the devastation was largely negative. The old Infallibilities—the Book and the Church—had been successfully disparaged. Man was on his own, and he was not in a very good position. A beneficent Science, an essential human Innocence, a belief in Progress, hope for a World Order, all the shining phrases of lecture halls were trampled in the mud of Verdun, and were fit only for ridicule or cynicism.

One of Shaw's post-War heretics is left alone on the stage, crying,

I stand midway between youth and age like a man who has missed his train: too late for the last, too early for the next. . . . What am I to do? . . . I am by nature and destiny a preacher. I am the new Ecclesiastes. But I have no Bible, no creed: the war has shot both from my hands. . . . We have outgrown our religion, outgrown our political system, outgrown our own strength of mind and character. The fatal word NOT has been miraculously inserted into all our creeds. . . . We will not kneel and we do not believe. But what next? Is NO enough? For a boy, yes: for a man, never. . . . I must have affirmations to preach.⁴⁹

Like the annoying Scottish philosopher, Thomas Davidson, whom the bright young Fabians abandoned years before, the post-War anti-hero must go in search once again of "the positive virtues".

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William Archer	Sir Sidney Lee
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Annie Besant	J. Ramsay MacDonald
Bernard Bosanquet	Margaret MacMillan
Edward Carpenter	Max Müller
G. K. Chesterton	H. W. Nevinson
Edward Clodd	Karl Pearson
Sir Edward Cook	Sir Frederick Pollock
Harold Cox	T. W. Rhys-Davids
Patrick Geddes	G. J. Romanes
G. P. Gooch	Bernard Shaw
Frederic Harrison	Lord Snell
Laurence Housman	Philip Snowden
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On the opposite side are a more numerous and vigorous band of workers, the High Churchmen



PASTIME
COLLECTIVE

BISHOP TYLE, AND, PRED CHOMAN
CHURCH ASSOCIATION
PENANCE - Give them a toll apiece, for a token against the relics
ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY
ARCHBISHOP OF YORK
BISHOP FRASER - Window not with every wind.
JACK FARRAR - I would thou wert cold or hot.
CANDON - Had an idol called Bel
CANDON LIDDON
CANDON KNOX-LITTLE
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27.-MACKONOOCHIE
28.-S. F. GREEN
38.-ENRAGHT
40.-The Hon. O. L.

KEEP CARD IN POCKET

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